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I'll Go to Bed at Noon

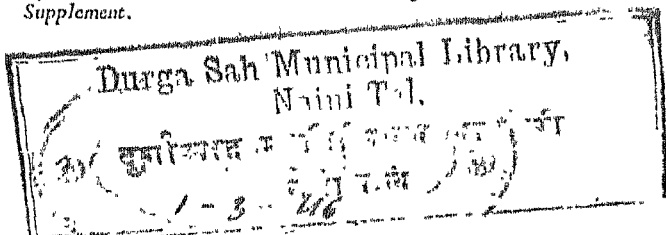
by

STEPHEN HAGGARD

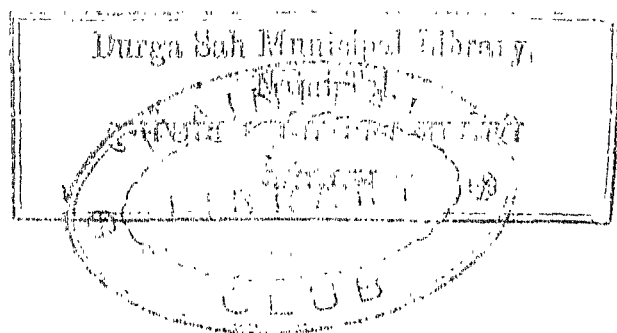
author of *Nya*

Stephen Haggard, the brilliant young actor, was killed on service in the Middle East. In the summer of 1940 his wife and their two small sons went to America, and through the night after they left, a night of London blitz, Stephen Haggard sat up writing at top speed against time. 'I've written straight off', he told his wife, 'a long letter to the boys telling them what sort of a fellow I am, what I believe and what I have experienced, for I feel I shall never see them again.' It was his wish that the letter might be published, and in case it were he chose the title that is now given to it.

'Such is the impression of individualism, sensitiveness and integrity left by Haggard's book—an impression of a man so different from the common pattern of collective youth which we have been asked to accept and yet so much in harmony with the experience of young men that this war has given to England, that to examine it in detail is to find encouragement continually renewed. . . . For the effect of Stephen Haggard's struggle for a disciplined individualism in art and in life upon his interpretations of events the reader must go to the book itself. He will be well repaid.'—From a full-page review by 'Menander' in *The Times Literary Supplement*.



I'LL GO TO BED AT NOON



To
PAUL, PIERS, AND MARK

Whose coming hither
consoles me for my going hence.

LEAR

*Make no noise, make no noise; draw
the curtains: so, so, so. We'll go
to supper i' the morning: so, so, so.*

FOOL

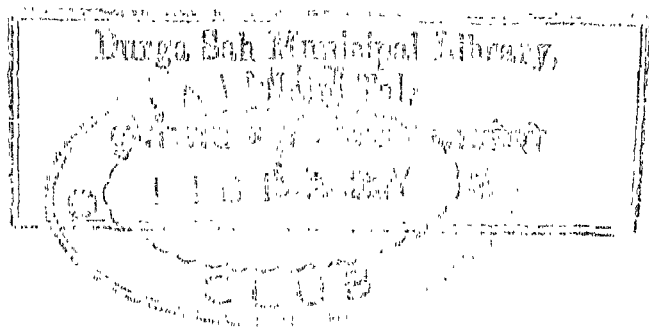
And I'll go to bed at noon.

I'LL GO TO BED AT NOON

A Soldier's Letter to his Sons

by

STEPHEN HAGGARD



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I wish to thank Sir Edward Marsh and
Christopher Hassall for their kindness
and helpful advice.

MORNA HAGGARD

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A COVERING NOTE

by Christopher Hassall

My Dear Boys: Your mother has given me the great responsibility of telling you about this letter. At present you are too young to read, so by the time this reaches you, thousands of other people your father never knew will have heard what he meant originally for your ears alone. But don't imagine that just because it will have become common property, it's any the less especially your own. If there was one thing your father abominated more than another (and he wasn't above prejudice, as you'll have been amused to hear long before now), it was the habit some people have of talking to children as though they were either dull-witted, or incapable of understanding their native tongue unless it be spoken in a high-pitched, wooing tone of voice. It's fairly easy for me to oblige him in this one respect at least, for there are his many friends, known and unknown, to consider as well as yourselves, and I only have to address you as their equals in age and sophistication to meet with his approval. Anyway, by the time this comes into your hands, you will have caught up with the others and become active citizens of a reconstructed world. And it's for your sake, whose special book this is, that our larger audience must bear with me if I go over what may be to them only too familiar ground.

You must try to picture the year and even the particular month when this letter was written, for it's not only the record of an individual's thoughts but also a reflection of the hour when he wrote. And I don't know which is the more vivid, the private history he intended, or the public history he achieved between the lines, as it were, more or less by coincidence. It's a snap-shot of the changing climate of sensation, caught at its most critical moment. It was June 1940,

The atmosphere was stifling. The deluge had already broken over France, and now it threatened England, pitch-black, sky-wide, enormous. When you read this the normal succession of night and day will have become once more inevitable. You will be able to look ahead. But during this June it seemed absurd to count on to-morrow; anything might have happened by then. The days we had grown accustomed to taking so casually, like a plutocrat who needn't take care of the pence, had now to be endured and fought for separately, one by one. We were bankrupt in time, or so it seemed, and the feeling was as though, threatened with inundation, we were desperately building dykes against oblivion. You had been safely packed off to America. Over here, the dykes held while men of your father's cast of mind underwent a grim transformation. The sort of people we had been died almost overnight. Civilization might be saved. It was just possible. But should we ever get back the private selves we had sent to the warehouse with our furniture? Somehow the strictly personal side of the matter seemed rather worse than forlorn. There was suddenly so much to do, of course, that we soon had no time to lament our buried lives; but just before the final plunge, unable to look forward, we looked back, and many of us saw ourselves in clear perspective, perhaps for the first time. At that moment, when History, along with the fates of countless human creatures, hung poised, your father chose to sit down and write his message. He riveted his mind, naturally enough, on the only sort of future he could reasonably count on. The sense of continuity seemed vastly more important than ever before, and he found consolation in the thought of your existence. 'It is this that gives me hope,' he wrote, 'not necessarily for myself, but for the future.' And his words were meant to bridge the gap between the possible end of his career and the beginning of yours. Crossing this bridge, therefore, ten or eleven years hence, you must be able to imagine the frame of mind in which it was built.

You may be surprised that he spends so many precious minutes in justifying his motives for joining up. The truth was, despite his protestations to the contrary, he was a Pacifist. What artist is not? But he knew the Nazis too well, and in order to help deal with them in the only adequate fashion, he had to renounce the principles he had stood for all his life. An artist, especially so independent and sensitive a spirit as your father, becomes a casualty in war long before the bullets begin to fly. He can't step into khaki as if it were just another suit. He must betray himself for the sake of a purpose larger than his private ends. (Everyone does this to some extent, but there are differences in degree.) If he survives physically, he will only have lost four years or so of productive life; but he may not get off so lightly. This letter is a calculated swan-song of the old self. There is sadness in it, and regret as of a man's body saying good-bye to his mind; a sober hope, too; a glimpse, in fact, of all his moods except the crowning one—his gaiety. He talks at length, yet his letter has the air of something dashed off in a hurry before an appointment, that rendezvous, as he so aptly quotes, 'at some disputed barricade'. At such a time it was an achievement to be articulate at all. I like the story Esmond Knight tells of him in his autobiography. It shows how he could never do things by halves. It wasn't enough for him merely to renounce his aesthetic way of life, dedicated to the contemplation of the beauty 'in women, in clouds, in thoughts,' as he put it, but he must become a fire-eyed prophet of Retribution. It was during Knight's last appearance on the stage before joining up in the R.N.V.R., and he recalls how, catching sight of your father glaring at him in the shadow of the wings, he heard him whisper fiercely, 'Promise me you won't act again until we have beaten the Hun'. It's surely as a restatement of an eternal paradox, the fighting Pacifist, that this letter rises above the purely personal association of father and son. He speaks to you about himself, and he speaks for all artists, in the sultry accents of a single crucial summer.

We are apt to feel dissatisfied, in certain cases, with the works that have been bequeathed to us, not because they are not valuable, but because we are convinced the man's contemporaries enjoyed an essential quality in him that is lost to us who come after. Keats is a great example. To have read his poems and his letters is not enough. One longs to have met him. This is to have become a legend. Greatness of achievement doesn't come into it, nor does it apply to many of the most illustrious names. It's a personal quality, apart from a man's genius. In the world of the theatre, your father is an interesting case in point. He is already a little legend. The most important thing about him was his being. Unlike Keats, who enjoyed an overwhelming singleness of purpose, he was afflicted with versatility, and there's no doubt he was hard put to it to co-ordinate his gifts. He wanted to make things with words, and he was confusingly capable in all the different methods. He brought to his acting the intensity, not of a mere interpreter, but of one creative artist collaborating with another. Despite the nagging pocket, he never accepted a part he couldn't enrich, and he was as uncompromising in his judgement of his own performances as he was with the efforts of others. He was always in search of something, the answer to a conundrum too vast and too vague to be put into words. He looked for it in the characters he had to portray no less than in the living beings around him. As he talked, he seemed to search your face. That poignant border-line of a hair's-breadth where laughter and tears come together, uncertain which is which; the haunted ardour of first love; the streak of Pan that lurked in the back of his mind—these were the subtlest and most characteristic strings of his instrument. Yes, more than once I could have sworn I heard the Pan-pipes blow as he appeared on the scene. He became an important actor overnight in New York with his performance of Chatterton in Clemence Dane's *Come of Age*, and soon after he achieved the same sudden success in London as Henri Gaudier in *The Laughing*

Woman, Gordon Daviot's play about the young sculptor and his companion, Sophie Brzeska. Many will remember him in *The Maitlands* and *The Seagull*, or making his first entrance in *The White Guard*, a young man arriving at a party, demolished with embarrassment because his boot had picked up something nasty in the street; or in the character of Marchbanks, sitting at the feet of his goddess and relishing the wonder of her name, 'Candida! . . . Candida!' Then there was his production of *Whiteoaks* in New York, which I never saw, and above all his own play, *Weep for the Spring*, which contained his best writing, and maybe his best acting. The scene was set in Upper Silesia, in the year 1934, when the Nazi darkness was gathering, and we saw a remote country house surrounded by ominous pine-trees, and there was a light shining in an upper window that seemed to symbolize the last glimmer of the civilized old order soon to be extinguished. If there was any daylight, I have no recollection of it. The characters moved and had their desperate being under a cloud. Against this sombre background we watched the tragedy of two generations beautifully portrayed by Miss Athene Seyler, Mr. Nicholas Hannen, Miss Peggy Ashcroft, and the author himself. He was happy in his cast, and he had chosen a theme that not only gave a timely warning of ancient evils revived, but also gave scope for his favourite human studies, the psychology of adolescence, and the problems of an artist, a born dreamer, driven by circumstances to tackle hard and uncompromising reality. The play had been produced by Michel St. Denis, and was driven off the stage far too soon by the mounting Blitz. And finally, there was his strange performance as a Shakespearean Fool, the part that gave him the title for this book. He neared maturity along with the seeds of war all over Europe, and if you substitute the catastrophe for the name of the old deluded king, your father's words about his last theatrical venture seem to apply strangely to his own life. 'To have one's best scenes first,' he wrote, 'to have no scenes at all

except when Lear, that terrific figure, is also on the stage, to be summarily and unexplainedly dismissed half-way through the play: these are disadvantages to any part, but especially to so slight and wistful a creature. . . .’

The time was bound to come when it was no longer enough for him merely to clothe another man’s ideas in his own flesh and blood. He published his novel *Nya*, and his name would appear unexpectedly under poems in the periodicals. These were very tenuous at first, like spun glass; but every now and then the distinct look of his personality would come and go between the lines. He was more cautious as a poet than in anything else he did. It wasn’t until the war made him angry and afraid that he began to feel at home with the medium and use it as a natural outlet. ‘Poetry has always been a pleasure,’ he wrote, soon after being called up, ‘but never a fierce hunger till now.’ ‘Farewell to 1939’ was the first poem of his I ever saw in print. It appeared anonymously in the Cambridge anthology *Fear No More*, and it remains among the best of the sixteen pieces chosen by your mother for inclusion in this volume. Of these, ‘The Mantle’, a grimly beautiful idea, and ‘A.A. Battery’, both wrought with the candour and pity of a born follower of Wilfred Owen, deserve a place in the war anthologies of the future. And with them I would class ‘The Return’. Here he has conveyed with remarkable subtlety the strange experience of a soldier coming home on short leave, like a prisoner on bail from another world, so that things once familiar trouble him with the sense of wistful unreality. Here too, is the phrase I have often repeated to myself,

Caressing shawls
Of silence wrap away the drum,

while ‘The Tear’, which came out posthumously in *The Times Literary Supplement*, more closely knit than the others, is a love-poem that many writers whose prime devotion is poetry might well be glad to have written. I have

mentioned his play. It was during the tour of it that conversations with Miss Athene Seyler resulted in a book unique in the student-actor's library. *The Craft of Comedy* is appearing almost simultaneously with this volume. It shows your father in his element, discussing his job, in the form of a correspondence with a mature artist whom he greatly respected. This device, even more than the form he chose for the present book, gave scope for a personal quality in his writing without which he was never completely at ease. The letters reveal a characteristic high seriousness, and for all his fortified opinions, a charming readiness to yield the keep, after friendly struggle, to older experience. There are several other plays he didn't finish, and at least two more novels still in manuscript. And yet it was neither as actor nor as writer, I believe, that he would have made his final mark. He always thought primarily in human terms. Abstract ideas were lost on him. He had to pin things down to personalities; thoughts had to be embodied before he could juggle with them. He was a successful teacher at an academy, and he wanted to develop the possibilities this side-line had opened up. Showing people how to do things had a peculiar fascination for him. He wanted to become an influence behind the scenes, a teacher who might see his theories embodied in a new movement; for he was well and deeply read in the Drama, to the exclusion of almost all other subjects, except perhaps German poetry, and his long correspondence with Mr. Granville-Barker, and with Stanislavsky himself, had helped him to clarify his thoughts.

But let me try to give you the quality of the man, which was so much more compelling than anything he did. More compelling because more rare. Every generation produces its outstanding actors and dramatists, but this little legend was, and is, all his own. He was sensitive to the life around him with the freshness of a stranger in a foreign country where the slightest detail is individually exciting. He couldn't take anything for granted, so that he was never guilty of even the

most innocent stock response. He seemed so different from everyone else that it was irritating until you realized he couldn't help it. And then, the last suspicion of affectation finally allayed, a man appeared born under the gap between two stars, a subtle variation on the normally remarkable. Nature had contrived a new way of winning the heart. More sensitive, without doubt, but not really so much more brilliant than certain others, he had come from a different starting-point, and so was distinct in kind rather than in degree. He never quite seemed to belong to London, though whenever I met him elsewhere it seemed all wrong. Much as he relished the theatrical hurly-burly, he would always be plotting an escape, back to the mountains if possible, it didn't matter which so long as they were monstrous and scraggy. This sounds intolerably romantic, I know, but it was true. Soon after his birth in Guatemala, his family moved to South America, for his father was then a long way from his present appointment as Consul-General in New York, and there was small chance of a settled home. Perhaps the Andes cast a spell over him. He used to think so. And at seventeen he had gone to live among his contemporaries in the wild recesses of Germany. He saw them become Nazis, and he broke away in despair, but not before the country had left the impression on him of a natural home.

But more than anything else, human relationships had control of his life. His creed, in this respect, has been well expressed by Arthur Hallam in a letter to Emily Tonnyson. 'It is by the heart, not by the head, that we must all be convinced of the two great fundamental truths, the reality of Love, and the reality of Evil.' He had read more human beings from head to toe than books from cover to cover; and those he valued he would come to again and again as though they were favourite anthologies. They could hardly be called a circle. Each was a different avenue for his quest. They were widely scattered, and not necessarily acquainted with each other, so that it was never the least surprising to discover

that So-and-So, the most unlikely character, had been intimate with him since boyhood. He seemed to need his friends as a traveller might need to open several accounts in branches of the same bank as he moved about the country. He would leave something positive behind, as though he had paid in a fat cheque of ideas or enthusiasms which he was tired of carrying about. We would feel the richer, and he, apparently, the easier, that one more credit was safely bestowed. And just as his opinions would harden into prejudices when his sense of humour was caught napping, so with his acquaintanceships—they tended to drift into extremes, so that his whole life was governed by the emotions they aroused. Not of his own will either. He was sometimes at their mercy. He would cross England for a brief conversation, but dry up half-way through a book, saying it got in the way of his thoughts.

His few enemies were largely imaginary, but I don't think he would have been without them, such was his relish of life's vigorous give-and-take. Much more than with most people, his greatest joys and sorrows were unwittingly brought upon himself. Though you could never rely on him to materialize when expected, once arrived, he would eagerly unpack his mind with all the zest of a man who had brought with him an armful of large and complicatedly-done-up parcels. Some hours later, so many topics had been raised and humorous digressions indulged in, so many thrilling ventures had been outlined, that the floor seemed littered, metaphorically, with string, brown paper, and fascinating exhibits. His companion having sat through this monologue listening with flushed and more or less mute applause, he would rise, thank him for being so witty and stimulating, as though he hadn't been doing all the talking himself—then go. His shoulders would jog ardently up and down as he shook hands. He had no hat, but he struggled into an overcoat that was never buttoned-up, and with a flourish of brown, rather dry-looking hair he was off and round the corner.

But it's on his own ground, in his flat near Notting Hill Gate, that I see him most clearly. He was slim, and of middle height, with a pale narrow face moulded neatly with no flesh to spare, and lined, especially round the eyes; and they creased when he laughed, which is the expression I best remember him by. His face in repose, slightly elfin, and rather too lean and drawn to be called handsome, suggested a man several years older than he was; but as soon as he spoke he gave himself away, for his movements were sudden and, like his mind, impulsive. His loose-fitting clothes were always strictly conventional, but anything other than his small bow-tie would have been unthinkable. Your home in those days was a cobbled mews, and the remnants of a stable could still be noticed in the odd-shaped ground-floor room where we sat and talked. The big unglazed painting by Hayter which he mentions in his letter, and which was destroyed along with his other possessions in an air-raid, hung on the left of the door above the little table where a portable gramophone was generally standing with the lid open. There was a jetty in the foreground of the picture, with a tall black lamp-post, and a bleak Cornish-looking mole stretched up to the right of the canvas. In the centre was a mass of mottled blue water and a number of small fishing-boats moored together with huddled masts; and the sky, like the sea, looked like rain. Three or four rows of built-in bookshelves stood on the floor along the opposite wall. There you would find Granville-Barker's Prefaces, the especially beloved works of Turgenev, a weird assortment of novels, and, ruling the roost, the plump cream-coloured volume of Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art*. Jammed between the window and one end of the shelves, a gas-fire managed to get its heat in edgeways, rather perilously, I used to think. The farther half of the room was approached by mounting two steps, a sort of broad platform, so that one couldn't sit at the piano without an uncomfortable feeling that one was about to give a public performance. The line of the steps was

broken by an upright beam, a relic of coaching days, now decently disguised in white paint, and a small wooden figure of Christ with bent knees, part of an antique crucifix, looked down from the top of the beam on the gas-fire, the books and coconut matting, the sofa and the low round table for ashtrays and coffee-cups. There was a much smaller room adjoining. This was your father's sanctum, with all the usual properties, a typewriter, too many pencils, pages of manuscript cancelled in green ink. It had no windows, but there was a big skylight in the ceiling. Here we would eat the unusual but never unappetizing dishes prepared by your mother. I have memories of hot red cabbage, and rice in more than one startling form. And now and then, during the meal, your father would shout instructions to the German maid upstairs. There were often quite lengthy exchanges of incomprehensible dialogue, the voices passing to and fro through the convenient skylight.

I wonder whether I've helped you to catch a glimpse of him. A difficult person to cast in a play, but you should have seen him as the young artist, Chatterton, Gaudier, the imaginary Marchbanks, Friedrich Brenn, the poet in his own play, or Mozart in the film. Don't go by the photographs. He was never so tranquil—never, at least, for longer than a snap-shot. Your best plan, dear boys, will be to piece out the imperfections of my portrait by looking in the mirror. But consider him a moment more. 'I have always had a fatal urge', he says in his letter, 'to pluck flowers by the way.' There's a great deal in that charming admission. He was the elusive Scholar Gipsy, with a touch of Pan; a latter-day Thyrsis who had lived in the mountains among the Satyrs. Perhaps one of his secrets was that he never discarded the stages of development as he passed beyond them. The mature man clung to his boyhood as to a friend who could teach him nothing new, but whose company, for its own sake, he couldn't live without.

It was into this private world I have tried to describe that

the war fell at last like a direct hit. A day or so after finishing his letter he was called up to a Training Centre of the Devonshire Regiment. Six months later he was transferred as a Corporal into the Intelligence Corps, and by the time he sailed for the Middle East in the summer of 1942 he had done a considerable amount of broadcasting to Germany from London, and had risen to the rank of Captain. He had only been working a few months in the Department of Political Warfare when he met his death on the 25th of February 1943. He was thirty-one. As a contribution towards their immediate hopes of winning the war, the enemy gained, I suppose, very little. It's our eventual Peace that will suffer the blow. When the things of the spirit once more come into their own we shall feel the lack of him as now we might feel the loss of an aircraft designer. There will be a deal to do, but we must build without him. At least he lived long enough to have given his generation a rare example of absolute devotion to his faith in Art, a quality that dedicates the soul, and without which victories are empty triumphs. He left a few writings but many memories, and above all, he left you made in his likeness, which takes more than half the misery out of the thought that he went to bed, just as he said he would, at noon. And now you're impatient to hear him, so I'll wish you good reading, and conclude by proudly subscribing myself your affectionate friend and godfather,

CHRISTOPHER HASSALL.

June 1943.

ONE

London
24th June 1940

My dearest sons,
I have just returned from Euston, where I saw you off this afternoon to America. You are both too young, thank God, to realize quite what it can have meant to me and to your mother to part as we have parted today. Britain is at war, of course, and life is full of partings just now. But it is the implications of this parting rather than its actual pain that are so full of horror for us, and of a kind of ominous significance for the future of the world as we know it now. For you and your mother are going to America to escape the possibility of a wretched fate, a choice between death and slavery. You are not going, as people of the last century went, with ambition and high hopes; you are not even going as the *Mayflower* pilgrims went, because they found the way of life in their own country insupportable. If that were the reason for your flight, there would be no great tragedy in it. There would be wretchedness, danger, hunger perhaps; there would be the panic and despair which fill all refugees who are uprooted from the country and the people they have loved for generations—and the world is full of these pathetic creatures at the moment. But there would be no tragedy in the poetic sense of the word.

In your present flight, however, there seems to me tragedy enough. You are fleeing because there is a chance—and on this 24th day of June 1940 a very good chance—that all the wisdom, all the kindness, the education, the comradeship, the visionary development of the last fifty years will have proved of no avail in the battle against evil which is now raging. I am not implying by this that the development of civilization in the last fifty years, especially in England, has been well cultivated; but I do believe that never before

in the history of this globe have so many creatures so ardently and simultaneously desired peace, and worked to achieve it; and never before has there been so blatant, cynical and utterly inhuman a case of 'aggression' as Hitler's. When you reach an age at which all this will interest you, you will no doubt find documentary evidence enough that what I say is true; for however cataclysmic the battle may become, I cannot imagine that it will lead to the destruction of every single archive in every single country. But who knows how much, or in what manner, the world may have changed by then; who knows, even, whether 'history' may not have been so cunningly falsified by those universal liars the propagandists that you, or others like you, may doubt the evidence of your eyes, and condemn such archives as you have access to as so much biased contemporary invention? To me (but not to Hitler) one of the most admirable characteristics of the human race is its power, even its desire, to forget a hurt. *You* will perhaps (and indeed I hope so) have forgotten, by the time you come to read this, what a frenzied, martial, slave-driven, adrenalin-injected German soldier is like, and the lengths to which he will go in order to rise to power—not power for good, but power for self-glorification and aggrandisement and therefore power for evil. *I* managed, in the twenty years between this war and the last during which I grew up, to get to know and to love the Germans—the people, I mean, not merely their music or their painting. I would not believe the men of the previous generation who fought in the 1914 war when they said the German was a bestial and unaccountable half-human being. And yet I now find myself as venomous in my hatred of him as ever my father was—indeed more so, for the German has developed quite admirably his talent for atrocity in the last twenty years.

However, it is not that which disgusts me so much; it is the fact that all the sacrifices of the 1914 war, the million of our best men, the shattering of the French country-side and

of Flanders, their reconstruction afterwards, and the timid, ineffectual and (I am beginning to feel) foolish groping towards a kindlier feeling between nations and a wider view of the destinies of the human race—all this has been wickedly and cruelly wasted, and I find myself, for the first time in my life, believing Hitler when he says that the Allies did not win the last war. Of course we didn't. We did not exterminate the German race, we did not march to Berlin, we permitted the reoccupation of the Rhineland, and we made all that sequence of tragic blunders ending in the most tragic one of all, the 'peace' of Munich in 1938, which has landed us in a worse mess than ever the British people has had to face since the Dark Ages. It is because of that sequence of tragic blunders that you and your mother have had to leave for America to-day, while England is turned into an armed camp, and I, an artist and a most pacific person, eagerly—yes, eagerly!—await the arrival of the little printed card which will ask me to report at such and such a place for military service. I pray that I may be given a job which will enable me to kill as many of the enemy as possible. Yet perhaps this is not strictly my desire, for the mere thought of killing, even in self-defence and in the heat of battle, is utterly repugnant to me. (For four years now I have not used my shot-gun because I can no longer endure even to kill rabbits, which are vermin.) But I tell you this so that you may see to what depths I have sunk as a result of this disease of evil which now rages like plague in the 'body evolutionary'.

Since I began to think for myself I have tried to approach every single aspect of life from my own direction. If I have time I'll speak more of this later. For the moment all I want to make clear to you is that *everything*, even this momentous and national question of war and of whether or not the pacific person ought to fight, I have for several years turned over in my mind and tested against my way of life and thought until I am sure that my attitude to it is an entirely

individual one, and not one conditioned by patriotism or mass-hysteria or even the plain fear of invasion and defeat of the country in which I prefer to live. I actually *want* to fight: and I believe that every man and woman in this, or any other still-civilized country, *ought* to fight. Your mother wants to fight too; but she is responsible for two tiny children,¹ so I have begged her to leave England. That is her most effective way of doing battle. You will be three mouths less to feed, three less to be hurt in air-raids, as your absence will mean that one house less will need to be inhabited. Obviously, if Britain is to be an armed camp, the outermost bastion of the last fortress of civilization and free thought, as many children with their mothers should leave as possible. We shall no doubt need many, many children to repair the dreadful destruction which will presently be wrought, and I do not mean only the destruction of lives, but of all those things for which we have lived and are now to die. You are two of those children, and you will, I hope, be among the builders of the new world. So it is right that you should be preserved. I hope I am not thinking too utopically when I say this: there *must* be a new world, for the only alternative now left to this little box of living-space to which the radio and modern transport have reduced this globe is complete self-annihilation. Yet even *that* would leave me my hope of a new world. Life itself will never die as long as there is one weed or one insect left breathing upon this planet. Life groped its original way to consciousness out of inert slime; and life will grow and develop again, if need be, from the smoking scrap-iron and rubble of the last bombshell. Out of even *those* ashes the phoenix will arise. And there is one advantage, too, in the widening of communications which the radio has brought about. Not merely evil but also good can speak across half the world to its own kind, can join its force to other forces, can marshal thought and spread

¹ Paul died in New York in December 1940, and Mark was born in December 1942. M.H.

encouragement and truth. And as there seems, on this fateful day, to be at a rough estimate about one half the world in favour of the good, and therefore not more than one-half in favour of the evil, the innate *desire* for good of the natural human heart, the instinctive choice of the positive, living, progressive, and constructive course of action which is and always has been Nature's choice seems likely to prevail in the end, and to spare some of us—you perhaps—the doom of utter disintegration. At least I will hope so: this hope will enable me to fight, and indeed it is just this hope that I am fighting for. I have no hope for myself at all. I do not say this either in despair or from a melodramatic desire to attract attention—even posthumous attention! It is simply because I know and fear our adversary and because I refuse to under-rate his strength in the way that our governments have done for so long. I do not see how we—that is, our forces as at present constituted—can possibly defeat him unless we work and fight and suffer a good deal harder than he. And on the 24th of June 1940, the day on which we have learnt of the shameful armistice to which the French have put their signatures, I see few signs in England of greater output or fiercer strength than that which the enemy has now achieved. We are told that it is only a few 'pro-Fascist Quislings' and not the French people who have signed the armistice. But we were told, not so long ago, that it was Hitler and not the German people whom we were fighting. Time may prove these assertions to have been false or true: for the moment, a little less wishful theorizing and a little more practical realizing are essential for us if we are to survive.

This is of course, a war of religion—ideology is our present word for that. It is not merely a question of good and evil, though. It is a war of dictatorship and democracy, of spoon-fed thought and free-thought, of dragooned life and happy-go-lucky life, of economic self-sufficiency and mutual barter, of machine versus man, of efficiency versus laziness, of clockwork and time-tables versus human hearts

and smiles—in other words it is a hopelessly complicated war. The loyalties are so ill-defined, and as the war continues to spread it grows more and more complicated and more and more frightening too, until only the strongest-minded or simplest-faithed people can grasp its issues at all. This might be less tragic if there were not, just at this moment, a peculiarly strong feeling of lethargy in most European lands. I do not know whether it is a result of the last war (psychological and neurotic), or merely a proof that the civilization of the Mediterranean Basin has degenerated for the last time and is preparing to give up the ghost altogether. But whatever its causes may be, it is having peculiarly disastrous results; it is like a bacillus which has infected the patient with an apathy towards life, so that he does not particularly care whether he lives or dies, and is therefore making little effort to live. It does not need a doctor to tell us that the patient is consequently in a very bad plight. Nothing will help him but a fierce struggle against that apathy; but this struggle is so important if the patient is to live that it seems to me personally to be the *only* important issue for us at the moment. Given the *will* to conquer, we shall certainly do so. But often and often I am made to shudder at the fear that that *will* is not there. I meet so many people every day who question and analyse and ‘intellectualize’ purely out of a form of lethargy or cowardice or perhaps both. Our problem is Hamlet’s problem. Resolution has always been our native hue till now: but suddenly we find it so sicklied o’er that it cannot even raise so much as a condemnation of itself.

Among the doubters and ‘intellectualizers’ the most interesting to me are the conscientious objectors. What judgement, I wonder, will *your* generation pass on this strange race of unwilling traitors, as they almost seem to me. They are infinitely more numerous in this war than they were in the last, they are more full of reasons or of subterfuges, I cannot tell which. They are more widely acknowledged and better treated than formerly, and their objections are listened

to with respect and sympathy. Some of them—many, I believe—are obviously simply cowards. Some of these I know and simply cannot help despising, though I hesitate to condemn any of them since I cannot understand them *all*, and may therefore be doing some of them an injustice. But some of them, and among these is one dear friend of mine, I love and also respect. And this I find so painful and so tragic that I have not yet been able to comprehend fully the unhappiness it has brought me. We meet once a week, this friend and I, because he only gets up to London once a week. At first we had long and most searching conversations; but lately our meetings have become gradually shorter, partly of necessity and partly because we are unfortunately finding we have less and less to say to each other that would not be bitter and tormenting. After our first discussion he told me I gave him the impression of a man drunk, though he didn't say with what. But I think he meant drunk with lust to kill or something of the sort, for I had told him, as I have confessed to you, that I felt I wanted to kill as many Germans as possible, my reason being that you can't argue with a mad dog, even if you *were* able to make friends with him when he was sane.

But if he thought me drunk I certainly found him warped. He had not the calm strength, the serenity, that deep conviction brings, even when so much is at stake as in his case (his job, his personal freedom, his friendships). He told me he was an objector because he could not bear to take life: with that I could agree. He said, too, that no war had ever achieved, settled, or proved anything. With that I had to agree also, to a certain extent. But I dearly wished the Allies had followed France's advice after the last war; something *might* have been settled if they had completely extinguished the conception of 'Deutschland', or if, alternatively, we had gone to the other extreme and restored all Germany's original colonies and her self-respect. He said that, with him, it was a deep *instinct* not to fight. This I could not understand

at all. Almost the strongest and most primal instinct man has is to fight in self-protection or in protection of his belongings or his young. My friend must be a most unusual exception. I know, of course, that I ought not to rule this out altogether. He *may* genuinely be an exception to this strong rule of nature: I only wish I were more fit to judge. For though he is my friend and I would not, even if he committed murder, pass judgement on him, since I know him to be a good and an honest and an intelligent man who could only do such a thing under the most fearful and therefore pardonable provocation, yet I wish for my own sake I could better understand him. If he is so convinced of his principles in the face of tremendous opposition, there is a greatness in him which must, I suppose, spring from those very principles. I despise myself for not seeing that greatness, rather than him for holding principles of which I cannot approve, and I feel a good deal of anguish because of this unresolved state of my mind towards him, just as I believe he feels a certain anguish because we cannot understand each other. For all our talking and letter-writing on the subject, it seems that we never shall. I feel as if I could meet and speak to him only through bars, but that I don't know which of us is outside and which inside them.

He, I think, has given up hope that we shall ever understand each other, and this makes me feel that his martyrdom is, in some obscure way, self-imposed by an intellectual concept rather than forced on him by a deep compulsion of his nature. I sent him a letter I received the other day. He simply returned it in silence. I will quote for you that part of the letter which I particularly wanted my friend to read; I hoped it might provide a common ground on which we might meet to continue our discussion. For this letter expresses a point of view with which I can wholeheartedly agree, and yet which (so I hoped) might appeal to my friend sufficiently to elicit some sort of response.

10th June 1940

'My own philosophy gradually turned against war, because it seemed to me a bad tool that, instead of doing the work it was proposed to do, spoilt the job and hurt the hand of those who used it. The alternative was faith in the invincible good nature of man—that with war or without it evil would be lessened by the nature of human life, Hitler and such phenomena notwithstanding. At the approach of war I formulated this for my own sake, and spoke it where I could; but now, though I cannot find any reason to recant, I find plenty of reasons to be silent. Most men going to war against brutality do so because, hideous as war is, it seems to them to be the only weapon left in their hands. The fighters and the pacifists have the same ideals, exactly, in rank and file. I cannot say that I *know* that in *Man v. Hitler*, man would win without war, though I think that, if I were not convinced of this, the last purpose of life would be disproved and creation would have to be admitted nonsense. I cannot help a wish that the great experiment might have been tried, that not passive but unsleeping and active goodness might have proved victorious. But now you and many, many others, hating war, I know, as much as I do, must put to the test this other theory.'

I ought to add, perhaps, that my pacifist friend believes that resistance, even passive, to fighting and all that war implies is in itself a good thing, is in fact the only form of 'action' which can be taken against war and even against those who indulge in war. I agree with him to the extent that if everybody in the world exercised passive resistance war would certainly cease. But if only *one* man refused to play, surely the whole effect would be stultified! It would be possible, in theory, for that one man to put all the others to death, when they would not have gained anything by their passivity, not even the moral victory of a good example; for there would be no one left alive to profit by it except the one Hitler who had originally scorned it.

You must forgive the length at which I have spoken about pacifism: but I believe that there is no more burning problem for present-day civilization than the 'non-combatant'—whether from conviction or cowardice or treachery—whom every state so trustingly cherishes in its bosom to-day. I would give a great deal to live until men have decided once and for all whether the true pacifist ought to be shot as a traitor or worshipped as a saint. I *have* a faith in the innate goodness of human nature, and in man's potentiality for godhead. But I am confused by the tumultuous events of the present moment, and during the last few years I have not had either the means or the leisure to retire from confusion and gather my convictions together in quiet meditation. I am sorry about this. I consider it most essential to retire every so often from the life one is leading in order to get a proper perspective view of it and to judge whether it is taking one in the right direction or not, just as a painter walks away every so often from his picture to study it from a distance. One of my chief ambitions has been to work only half the year, but lucratively enough to live abroad for the other half and write. Such a scheme would have provided the requisite peace of mind and the environment for true, steady, and constructive thought. I was never able to put it into practice, however, except once for three months, when we spent our summer holiday in the mountains above Innsbruck, waiting for the first of you to be born. The thinking I did then gave me an immense inner strength: I acquired a calmness and power of concentration which, had I been able to keep and to develop it, would have moved those very mountains. I felt a serenity, and a deep conviction of the constructive power of goodness, which made me want to give up all the material ties which bound me to a conventionalized existence and to live like a peasant, or like Christ, with no malice in my heart, preaching acceptance and passive goodness to the mountain folk. Perhaps that is the nearest I have ever come to being a pacifist. I cannot tell,

though, how this feeling would have stood the test of experience, for I had to return to London after three months to earn my living again. The strength I had acquired lasted for some time: in fact I believe that I still feel some benefit from it, for deep thought is as positive a thing as healthy exercise, and one's whole being profits from the one just as one's body is strengthened by the other. But the serenity did not last beyond the New Year. It is not possible in a huge town, with all that weight of personalities, especially of such harried, nervous ones, all round you, to keep your quiet self in hand. If you want a proof of this, just notice for yourselves how different you feel in a big town on a Sunday when it is half-emptied of people, and how different the very atmosphere around you is. The mere presence of a lot of people unbalances me to a certain extent. I get pugnacious when I'm standing in a queue, and stupid when I'm in the thick of a Hyde Park crowd. I am not a normal human being, in that my gregarious instinct is hardly at all developed and I am really happiest when I am alone. I am sure that many people are the same. Now that herding together is not necessary for the safety of the human community any longer the gregarious instinct will tend to die out. In fact I believe human beings may presently develop an anti-gregarious instinct as a form of protest against the wretched results of living together in big towns.

TWO

This war has come upon me at a transitional period of my development. I have been trying in the last few years to feel my way towards writing as a profession and not merely as a side-line or an occupation for my mind during a holiday, which is all it has been to me up till now. I have always known I wanted to write; I have suspected for a long time that I want to write more than anything else. But I have never made up my mind quite what sort of writing appealed to me most; and I have wanted, and in fact needed, the music, books, pictures, holidays, travel, and human contacts which, in this expensive world, only money can bring. So I have not yet had the courage to leave my other work—the stage—for writing: and besides, until war broke out there seemed a slender hope that I might, by going into management and being my own employer in the theatre, arrange matters so that I could both write and act. For I don't believe I could *ever* desert the theatre entirely: I love the people in it and the vigour of its atmosphere too much. But I am happier writing; and the exhilaration of having produced ten pages of fine writing is more satisfying than the exhilaration of having given a fine performance. The former is my work alone: for the latter I am partially indebted to the other members of the cast.

However, the problem has been settled for me up till now by financial considerations. In the theatre I have, without even trying very hard, been able to make between £1,000 and £2,000 for the last three years. I say I didn't try very hard because I have never taken an engagement for purely financial considerations. If I had done so it would not have been difficult to make a good deal more. Still, it seems to me that one ought to adjust the balance between what one *could* earn and what it is *expedient* to earn. And if the war had not

come to upset my plans I had determined to aim at making £2,000 a year, which would, I believe, have left me enough time for writing, and enough money with which to find out something about all the various aspects of existence, such as learning, leisure, music, travel, riding, gliding (and, I might add, domesticity), which interest me.

I am sure that, the world being what it is, money is essential to the leading of a reasonably full existence. It saves one so much time. If I can pay someone to wash up, run errands, write letters or type my book for me, obviously I am gaining time and energy for more important things. Believing this, I have always spent every penny I earned, and I cannot say I regret it the slightest bit, even though it has meant that I've had no 'margin' to fall back on in the hard times that have come with the war, and that I now have nothing to leave to you and your mother except the manuscript of a play and, if I have time to finish it, a book. If the play is put on at the right time—a few years after the war, say, when hatreds have died down and people will be willing to distinguish again between a slave-driven people and a gang of slave-drivers—it ought to be a success, just as *Journey's End* was, and for some of the same reasons, though it is a different kind of play. But who will know when the right moment comes? And, in any case, what will the world be like? And will this war *ever* end? You, reading this, in the security of some distant land and time, will smile at these questions of mine. Before you see this page—even before you learn to read well enough, perhaps—these questions may have been answered for you. You will have to forgive me if they seem puerile to your more fortunate intelligence. You will have to forgive me if my doubts and croakings seem exaggerated in the light of your greater knowledge. You must remember that on the night of the 24th of June 1940 I stand before a door which has opened into the darkness. I cannot see what is outside that door, whether it is only a darkness shrouding a concrete and beautiful world which is one day to be illu-

minated again; or whether the darkness hides an utter emptiness, a pit of doom, fathomless in its despair. I confess I can see absolutely nothing beyond the gloom. This does not mean that I have no hope of finding something. I have, strangely enough, a strong hope; but I cannot be sure it is a hope for myself.

My sole religion consists of a belief and reverence for Life. (I write it with a capital letter because I mean the Force of Life, and not the experience of living.) Partly, I think, because of you two (in whom some particle of me will endure), and partly because of an intellectual pride in the development of *homo sapiens* of whose species I am a member, I feel more interested in the perfection to which mankind can and must evolve than in the immortality of any particular human being—even of myself. I have tried to develop myself as fully as possible. My efforts seem to have been balked for the time being, which is a pity, as I was just beginning to find out how to get the best out of my capabilities. But that which I have become I have in some measure transmitted to you, and shall be able (through your mother) to nurse and develop in you. I therefore feel that I have to some extent furthered the purposes of Life and, in my own way, actively asserted my faith in my religion. It is this that gives me hope—as I have said, not necessarily for myself but for the future. I can therefore face the blackness of that open door with a certain degree of equanimity, though naturally I should much prefer to know what I was fighting for and whether I had a chance of coming through.

The war has simplified my life considerably by making for me several sweeping decisions over which I intended to take at least a year or two of deliberation. Chiefly, the financial problem has restricted my choice of employment to the job which paid best—to any job which paid at all in fact. This has led to the most dreadful waste of time for, of course, I have not been able to do any of the work I meant to do, but have had to spend precious hours, doubly precious now,

touring the provinces in bad plays, or rushing from one end of London to the other for the sake of earning an odd guinea. If it were not for the war I would not grudge this time; I have collected a lot of experience which I should never otherwise have gained. For I have had, on the whole, an easy and successful life on the stage and have never before had to take a job I didn't like or couldn't believe in. But now that I see my life and my artistic productivity curtailed I do resent bitterly the acquisition of this interesting, but for the present useless, experience, and feel I would prefer to have had five hundred pounds on which to live in retirement and write during the nine months which have elapsed between the outbreak of war and my conscription. Even if I had had it, however, it would have been no guarantee that I should have written anything worth leaving behind me. There are no incentives to writing like pressure of time and violent emotion, from both of which I am suffering at the moment to a quite remarkable degree—so I shall hope that what I am writing now is at least of interest to you, and may perhaps even contain some quality that will give pleasure to other people if they should come across it. It is partly in the hope of this, and partly too so that you should have some idea of the sort of man your father was, that I intend to write as fast as I can until that little printed card arrives.

It is a dangerous thing to do, of course. It is hardly the way to produce a work of art; and, as an artist, I am nothing if not vain, and very much dislike the thought of leaving behind me a piece of work that is not as perfect as I can make it. I shall probably have no time to correct it. I may never see the typescript. I shall certainly not be able to put it away for three months and then take it out again and 'surprise' it in order to find out whether it is well written or not; and that's a thing I believe in doing, just as a painter tries to take his painting unawares by not looking at it for a week or two and then, one day, suddenly uncovering it.

No! If I began to think about it at all I should lay down

my pen and put all this away till after the war. But I shall not allow myself to think. I have thought quite enough for the last year. It has not been the steady, constructive thinking of the Lunsbruck holiday, but it has been more concentrated, anyhow in spurts—the flight of a swallow rather than of an eagle. So this book, this letter or whatever one might call it, will not be entirely impromptu, for it is in a way the result of a year's thought. And as Mozart was able to write down that exquisite overture to the *Magic Flute* in a night because it had been in his head for several months, so I shall try, in the few hours that remain to me, to write down for you as much as is in my mind of this Overture—or should I say Epilogue?—to my life. For I want you to know, when you are building your new world, what a fairly intelligent and honourable specimen of the old one was thinking and struggling to achieve.

THREE

Somewhere in his memoirs, I believe, Rachmaninoff has said that he wished he had been either a composer, or a pianist, or a conductor, but not all three, for then he might have been a great musician. It is certainly a burning problem. How many people are strong-minded enough to give up something at which in the opinion of others they excel, simply because in their own opinion they cannot be ranked among the greatest in that art? It will sound conceited if I say that this has been my own problem: it would be more correct to say that it was about to become my problem when the war postponed it and possibly settled it for ever.

Almost every member of our family can write a little, and so the idea of becoming a writer has been present in my mind since I was a schoolboy. My great-uncle was a shining example to me—especially at that age, and I don't suppose there are many of his novels that I had not read before I was seventeen. But the idea of becoming an actor came to me more or less by accident, which is perhaps an indication that I was never really intended to be one. When it came, however, it offered a better chance of making a living, and also all the attractions which a life on the stage brings with it (high salaries, impecuniosity, glamour, flattery, quarrels with one's family, etc.) and which seem so desirable to one in one's 'teens. So I leapt into it with both feet, and after a month's training could think of nothing else.

My stage career has been an inverted one. I had all my greatest successes at the beginning and did all my hardest work at the end. I was frightened of success when I had it and so could not properly enjoy it. I refused fantastic offers from Hollywood because they would have interfered with my work—which was true: and I did not enjoy or capitalize

the fruits of my success because they might have turned my head—which is probably also true. I was very serious. I swore never to take a good part in a bad play as long as I could get a bad part in a good play. In this I succeeded. It is almost the only ambition of mine in which I have succeeded. My other ambitions I have only partially fulfilled, because I was taking a long view of their importance and trying to believe that there would be no war. I don't know whether I now wish I had taken a shorter view and gone bald-headed for what I wanted. I should have achieved more, possibly. I might have had my chance at the Romeos and the Hamlets. I might have left, perhaps, one more play and one more book behind me. But I am not sure if they would have been much good. All my family have always developed slowly, and I am certainly no exception. At the age of twenty-nine I feel about twenty-five, and though in some things I know as much as a man of forty, I have achieved extremely little in comparison with many people of my age. Emlyn Williams, for instance, who can only be a year or two older than I, must have some ten or fifteen plays to his credit. John van Druten, Noel Coward, Rodney Ackland, at my age how much they had achieved! John Gielgud, Michael Redgrave: they knew what they wanted and they went for it, looking neither to right nor to left. I have always had a fatal urge to stop and pick flowers by the way. As soon as I found I could act I became interested not in acting for its own sake, but in acting as a means to an end, in actors, in playwriting, in producing. As soon as I found I could write I became interested not in writing for its own sake, but in writing as a means of expressing my aspirations, a crystallization of my day-dreams, and in the processes of thought which the act of writing involves. When I found I could write a novel I wanted to write plays. When I found I had written a play I wanted to write poetry. I would plan a book and a play ahead—as Clemence Dane once told me that she did—and this before the ones already in my head were even started.

At one period I had five plays in my head, but I scrapped them all because I could not feel I wanted to write one more than any other, so I thought they would probably all turn out bad. There were not many months when I was not writing something. Granville-Barker has said that one ought to write for five years for the waste-paper basket; and as a matter of fact it was just five years after I started writing in real earnest that I had something accepted by a publisher. It was my novel *Nya*; and as it was Faber who published it I was tremendously encouraged. A little later on my play was produced—though the war prevented it from coming to London. After this I acquired a little much-needed self-confidence. I began to think of myself as a writer. I occasionally entered the word 'author' instead of 'actor' in insurance policies and hotel registers. And I began to fret.

I fretted because I had no time for writing. I would get an idea for a book, work it out in my mind, and yearn to sit down and write it; but I was always prevented from doing so as I was either in a play, in which case I had no time, or out of work, in which case I had no money. But even if I had been rich (as I was once for two glorious months in 1938) I am not sure if I should have had the peace of mind or the *élan* to work properly. My mind was not at rest, one felt the world rushing towards disaster, and your mother and I were in the process of readjusting our relationship with each other, which had been considerably altered by the arrival of our children: an extremely difficult time which no doubt happens to all married people, but which was of course new and unfamiliar to us. I would find that by the time I had the leisure to start writing I had outgrown my original idea and was eager to start on another one; but I hesitated to do that because I knew it wasn't yet ready to be written.

One grew very quickly in those days. I feel that 1938 and 1939 must have aged us all a good deal more than two years. It was chiefly the uncertainty that played such havoc with our nerves—the alternate wild hope and black despondency.

Once war had been declared, strange as it may seem to you, we all experienced a feeling of relief.

The problem of whether to remain an actor and write 'between plays' or to be a writer and perhaps act between books is one which I shall now probably never have to solve. Still, it is a problem of more than academic interest, for it is bound up with many other aspects of life. If one is to be an actor, for instance, should one give up all outside interests and concentrate only on the theatre, and become the egotistical and opinionated creature that a great actor always seems to be? Acting is not like writing, or painting, or composing music; an actor depends for his success on the approval of the many, and if he has not this approval he may as well give up acting. An actor trades in emotion, his instruments are his body, his voice, his looks. He must develop them if he is to be good at his job; yet if he does develop them, can he avoid becoming a self-conscious and conceited introvert? Very seldom. What the actor and every young aspirant to that profession must decide is whether it is worth his while, in return for the undoubted rewards of a successful stage career, to forgo his spiritual development, his friendships, and his chance of widening his experience of human nature until it can be called wisdom. Acting is not a satisfactory art for so-called normal people—nor for that matter is any other art. The tragedy of many normal people is that they fail to realize this; while the tragedy of many actors is that they attempt to circumvent it. An actor *must* possess, to a remarkable degree, some quality of personal beauty or attraction that is unusual: with this as a *sine qua non* he can then proceed to develop his technical accomplishment and his talent. In order to do this it is not only legitimate but desirable for him to lead a different life from the 'normal' person, a life which the 'normal' person would probably consider unmoral. This used to worry me a great deal when I first went on the stage, less because of my own scruples than because of my most respectable relatives. But in a second-hand shop

in Munich I found a book by a well-known actress called *Ist die Schauspielkunst eine moralisch-berechtigte Kunst?* (Is acting a morally justifiable art?) This delighted me, especially as the authoress, after a most thorough examination of all the facts, decided that it was! I had the book bound in yellow calf with specially designed covers and swore that it should be my bible. Needless to say, once I got on to the stage I never looked at it again; and I don't suppose it was ever opened until last year, when it was used as a property in a play, for which its slimness and expensive binding made it very suitable! But I was often glad that the actress who used it couldn't read German, for if she had understood some of the weighty solemnities to which the authoress gave utterance in that little book she might have found it hard, during the performances, to keep a straight face!

Of course acting is not in the least unmoral. Nor need the life of an actor off the stage be other than blameless. Admittedly it seldom is—by 'normal' standards. But this is not because actors are unmoral people; it only appears so because, of all people of individuality, actors are most in the public eye and therefore their private lives have a wholly disproportionate limelight shed upon them. In point of fact, actors behave no more 'unmorally' than any other people of strong personality who find the stereotyped rules of society inadequate as a guide to conduct. Still, I must say I should welcome a 'back to secrecy' movement among actors of the present day. A little more hard work and a little less publicity would do much towards restoring some dignity to our theatre. Too many members of the public are accustomed to 'going round behind' after the play, too many of them are 'related to someone on the stage', too many interviews are given by theatre people and too much is written about them in cheap film-magazines. It is not the public but we who are at fault. We enjoy this publicity and are told that it enhances our 'box-office value'. Perhaps it does—for those of us who have nothing but themselves to sell. To true artists, however,

it seems to me to bring nothing but harm. It would be a good thing if actors and actresses maintained a greater reserve towards the public, if actresses would cease playing at being society ladies, and also if the society ladies would stop trying to be actresses. As for the men, if they did not have to exhibit their personalities in public so often they would not find themselves alternately flattered and despised for those possibly rather feminine characteristics which help to make them good actors. And when they no longer felt they had to assert their personalities off the stage as well as on, they would cease to consider themselves as peculiar people.

I have said that I suffer from a fatal urge to pick flowers by the wayside. The art of the theatre and the people who work in it enthrall me, but I find it hard to give up all my time to acting, which ought to be a whole-time job. A real actor of the modern theatre—say the Stanislavsky school, for instance—should exercise his body and his voice each day, apart from rehearsing, which he will have to do almost every day, and playing, which he will certainly have to do every night. How then will he have time to read, think, walk in the country, talk to (non-theatrical) friends, learn the piano or look at pictures? Obviously he will not. The more enthusiastic he is about his work the less time he will have, and the narrower and less elastic his mind will become.

It is for these reasons that I have recently been tempted to leave the stage: but if once I stopped acting it would have to be for good. I cannot bear to do things badly, and to act spasmodically is to act badly. Yet the more I learn of the technique of acting the more fascinating I find it and the more difficult it becomes to give it up. It would always be possible to teach acting, of course; and in fact I do enjoy teaching immensely. But I should not like to be condemned to teaching for the rest of my life. One would soon become so interested in detail and technique that one would lose the magic of one's artistry—the only thing which is peculiarly and invaluable one's own. The solution of the problem in

my case would be to become a producer. In producing there is a mixture of acting, teaching, writing, and analysis which enormously appeals to me: there is scope for the imagination and for one's love and understanding of human beings. Production can also be conveniently combined with writing.

Granville-Barker is a man whom I admire tremendously, both for his work and his character. He seems to me to have got the maximum productivity out of his span of life. The last war disorganized his life as this one is disorganizing mine, but he was older when the last war broke out than I am now and had managed to accomplish a good deal more than I have.

I have had the good fortune to be produced by Granville-Barker, which is something I shall remember all my life. I did not make such a success of my part in his production as I should like to have done, but it was actually the peak of my theatrical career in every other way, and I like to remember that it may be the last considerable production I shall ever have been in. Nowadays one cannot help feeling that each action, each word, each pleasure may be one's last, and it intrigues me to think that the Fool in *King Lear* may be the last part I shall ever have played, and that the last line I spoke upon a stage should be the uncannily appropriate one with which the Fool is so arbitrarily dismissed to his death by Shakespeare:

And I'll go to bed at noon.

I cannot resist the ominous significance of it when I think of the Fool's undramatic exit at what must have been the high-noon of his life, though not his fortunes. That is why I have chosen it as the title of this book.

I worked conscientiously at the part, and after two weeks or so was, I think, playing it as well as I could play it, though my singing voice was never good enough. It is a difficult part, the most difficult in Shakespeare, Granville-Barker says. And except perhaps in the first scene it is a thankless

one, too. To have one's best scene first, to have no scenes at all except when Lear—that terrific figure—is also on the stage, to be summarily and unexplainedly dismissed halfway through the play: these are grave disadvantages to any part, but especially to so slight and wistful a creature as the Fool, surrounded as he is by almost titanic characters. I sketched him in too lightly on the first night—among other things I was worried about my recorder, which I had not had time to practise enough; by the end of the run he was a much more plastic figure. But the critics come to the first night (why, I have never been able to understand, since they can never see the best performance on a first night) and it is the critic's notice, and not our performance, that goes down to history.

And now I come to one of the greatest disadvantages which acting has for me, namely the fact that an actor can leave nothing behind him to show the quality of his work. Perhaps it is vanity in me, perhaps it is also a result of the accelerated transitoriness of everything in our present world, but I dearly long to leave something behind which shall add a richness, however humble, to the artistry of mankind. Perhaps I should say, 'I longed'; for I have not the time now to develop my own artistry to a perfection at which anything it may produce would be worthy to rank with established masterpieces. That art in which I have spent ten years training myself and at which I am only just beginning to acquire a genuine proficiency is an art that will die with the death of the last person who saw me act. If I had been a tremendously successful actor my name might have endured for a little longer, but it would have endured for the wrong reason, that is on account of my success and not because of the quality of my work. And it is not success that I desire; it is the satisfaction of producing a piece of work that is good, that I strove to make good, that I knew to be good, and which posterity, approaching it without favour or prejudice, will find good also.

It is infinitely more difficult to control the quality of a performance than of a book or of a picture. An actor depends not merely for the success but also to a great degree for the quality of his acting on an audience, on other actors, on the play-script, even on producer, set-designer, and stage-hand; whereas an author, a painter, a poet, depends solely on himself. So it happens very seldom that an actor can say of one of his performances: 'That was as good as it could possibly be'. He will almost always, if he is artistically honest, have to add 'under the circumstances'. For, though he may have been giving of his very best, the house may have been poor or his leading lady may have had a cold, and his performance will have fallen short of perfection by the amount of help that they did not give him.

Many actors would say that I am being absurdly critical in judging acting from this point of view. But in reality I am judging acting no more harshly than every good poet or painter judges his own work. *The poet and the painter, able to lay their work aside if they wish and to re-examine it at their leisure, perhaps when they are in a more suitable mood for it, can profitably distinguish between 'that is as good as I shall ever make it' and 'that is as good as it can be under the circumstances'.*

Another thing I have found difficult is to judge the quality of my own performances; in fact it is only in the last two or three years that I have acquired any confidence at all in my judgement. Before that I was criticizing myself so analytically all the time I was acting that I can never have given a performance that was not studied and self-conscious. Before that again—and ironically enough this was the time of my greatest success—I was more or less an amateur, and so blissfully unconscious of the difficulties of what I had to do that I sailed through them on the strength of my enthusiasm, while my intense sincerity covered up most of my faults. Not until I had been three years in the London theatre and seven years on and off the stage, did I grow out of both my

amateur and my studied periods of acting and give a performance which was exactly what I had intended it to be. That was in the part of 'Marchbanks' at the Globe. For about two months I gave as many good performances as any one can give who is playing the same part eight times a week; and then, quite suddenly, in the middle of the run, I lost sight of the character. It was as if I had said all I had to say about 'Marchbanks' and had outgrown him overnight. After that I could not approach the part with a fresh interest at each performance; I had to rely on remembering how I had played him up till then, with the result that I didn't throw any fresh light on him and my performance no doubt became stereotyped. Even when I played him again at a revival a year later I could do nothing new with him, and though 'Marchbanks' is a part I love and *Candida* a play I very much admire, I don't feel now that I ever want to have another shot at him.

After *Candida* I went to America in *Whiteoaks*, playing the part of 'Finch' and producing Ethel Barrymore as the old grandmother, which was an invigorating experience. The mere prospect of it, when the proposition was first put to me on this side of the Atlantic, terrified me out of my wits, even though Ethel Barrymore was still four thousand miles away. I had heard many stories of how difficult she could be. But I had to take the job for financial reasons, and besides the chance of producing a play in New York was too good to be missed. My innate love of battle overcame my artistic scruples, and I sailed for New York with a printed copy of the play under my arm. Before I left I had obtained permission from Mazo de la Roche to make such alterations in the script as I thought necessary, and as the published version had been taken from the acting script of Nancy Price's production, a good deal of alteration *was* necessary, especially to the final curtain and to the redundancies of the second act.

After *Whiteoaks* I played in *The White Guard*, the play with which Michel St. Denis was starting his new Repertory

Theatre at the Phoenix in 1938. I gave up a good deal to join him, which I have never regretted, though it was the beginning of my financial difficulties. His theatre seemed to me the *real thing* at last, the artistic venture run on a co-operative basis not for personal profit but for love of the theatre. However, that scheme, alas, went the way of many others and foundered in the quicksands of impractical management.

Twelfth Night was the second play of the season, and I was to play 'Feste' in it. But after ten days' rehearsals Michel St. Denis decided I was unsuitable for the part and gave it to somebody else. This was the first time such a thing had happened to me, and it hurt me, not (I think I can honestly say) on account of the blow to my vanity. But my disagreement over 'Feste' with Michel had made me a friend out of that charming, sensitive, and artistically fascinating Frenchman, and this is a friendship which more than compensates me for the unhappiness I felt over the loss of my part (and of course my position in the company, for which I had given up so much).

You must forgive me talking at such length about my acting, but *Whiteoaks* and the 'Feste' incident were two events in my life which had a great influence on my mental development. The first was very profitable: it strengthened my personality and made me assert myself in the theatre, which I had always before been too timid to do. And the second, though it brought me a fine friendship, had I think a bad effect on me. It made me give up, after long tenacity, my hopes of ever founding a new theatre with other people, and concentrate on developing in my own direction and alone. Perhaps this, too, was good for me, in a way; but as you will have gathered by now, I am not much attracted to the theatre of the individual star performer; I only find pleasure in the team-work and subtlety of the Stanislavsky or the Reinhardt or the Granville-Barker schools.

FOUR

The air-raid warning has just sounded. It is the first time I have heard it since last September, and I had almost forgotten what the noise was like. I can hear the other members of the household coming down the stairs in their slippers to go into the shelter. I can't tell you how thankful I am that you're not here to-night. An air-raid on London—the first real one of the war—and two tiny children to be woken, dressed, and hustled down into a cold basement, there to await goodness knows what sort of fate! In the very far distance I can hear the thud of guns, and occasionally the windows of this room mutter uncomfortably. We are quite calm to-night, however. There are no excited shrieks, no wrestling for gas-masks or panic-stricken scutterings, as there were during the first warnings of the war.

How soon, I wonder, will all these horrors be relegated to some shameful and unbelievable past? Will it happen in your time that bombers, sirens, and air-raid shelters will be fit only for museums or possibly as warnings to refractory and aggressive citizens? Will there come a time when you will be able to laugh at our pathetic attempts to fight a monster with fair words, and seventy-ton tanks with twenty-year-old rifles? And if so, how will it be achieved? By annihilation of the Hitlers and the Mussolinis, or by complete surrender to them? I wish I knew. If I did it would give me not only hope but strength to fight with. As it is, I am—we are all—fighting in the dark; and while we wait in our cold basements for the bombs to fall, we ask ourselves what we can do—what we desire to do—to set the world to rights after the war. Perhaps it is up to us, who may not be alive, to hand on our knowledge, such as it is, to you; perhaps we ought to write down everything that we have learnt till now for the benefit of those of you who are still too young to

near, and who will be separated from us by the great gulf of this war.

Yet I wonder whether our advice would be much use to you. Your world will obviously not have much in common with ours; it may scarcely even have a link with it, except perhaps for a few tired and disillusioned old people who will remember this bad world with the affection one feels for the things one has grown up amongst, and who will never cease to feel strange in your new world, however brave it may be. It would be fatal to take advice from them; and though I am not yet either old or tired or disillusioned, it would probably be equally fatal to take advice from me. I am a blind embryo in the womb of some cataclysmic upheaval; my advice would be coloured by the agonized desire I share at this moment with Goethe for 'light, more light'. Whereas you may find yourselves when you wake to manhood in a blaze of splendid sunshine.

And anyhow I mistrust advice. I think I had too much of it when I was young. It bred in me a certain cautiousness and (I firmly believe) interfered with my natural development. I was really quite an amenable child, in spite of a flaming temper, and I always listened to what I was told. This vice clung to me till I was almost grown up, and I still occasionally stumble across the ill-effects of it. Then I discovered that quite satisfactory results could be obtained by listening to everyone's advice and then doing what I had intended to do all along. This satisfied both my obstinacy and my innate humility. But now I fear I listen to no one, and am most impatient of anyone's opinion on my affairs except my own.

This is partly because, having decided to be a man of the theatre, any course of action I take will have to help me towards my goal in this field. It is a little ruthless, but it simplifies life a good deal. Of course I am married and have two children, and so three other people are affected by any decisions I may make. But if any conflict of interests arose I

should be compelled by some force in me which is stronger than love or compassion to take the decision which safeguarded my own sphere of activity and my freedom to work and move in that sphere as I wished. I fear that I shall shock you by saying this. You will say, 'What a hard man he was' — 'What a cruel man' perhaps! But I hope you will add, 'What an honest man'; for it isn't pleasant for me consciously to give you an unflattering picture of myself like this when by merely keeping silent I could leave you with the impression that I was not a bad sort of fellow really. My honesty, I am afraid, is rooted deep inside me; it is one manifestation of that force which is stronger than love or compassion, and which I cannot either name or quite describe. It is more than just selfishness; it is not mere self-assertion. It is self-assertion with a creed behind it, a conviction that what this inner force compels me to express is of more value to the human race than the peace of mind or freedom from suffering of those who, even unconsciously, obstruct its expression. I know of course that this force in itself does not make me a great artist: mediocre artists possess it too, and are often far more ruthless in exercising it because they are less sensitive people. Ruthlessness does not make the artist, though I believe the artist cannot function properly without a rather strong degree of it.

Of all bad qualities I believe insensitivity to be the worst. For this reason I never now rebuff an overture from any human being, however clumsily it may be made. I used to, when I was younger; I lived in a shell which I strove to make impervious to all advances from other people. It was your mother who rescued me from this self-atrophy. With a touching and most courageous tenderness she refused to be shrivelled by my cruel rebuffs—and a sensitive person who has become warped as I had can be terrifyingly cruel in his perceptions. Time after time she groped her way through my shell (and she was very young then and hadn't any knowledge of human nature, but only her instinct and her

sweet faith), and each time she pierced my defences I hit out as fiercely as I could, till her poor young heart must often have bled from the bitterness of the struggle. I know I was not worth her anguish—no human being can be worthy of such pain. But love does not seem to ask questions of this kind, nor to consider such things as cost and proportion: and there came a day when my defences broke down and dry and difficult tears melted away the last traces of my shell. I can remember quite clearly my sudden fathomless relief, and the change in your mother's eyes from weary sadness to a puzzled joy. Afterwards I was filled with such elation that I felt, like Mr. Plattner, as if I should soar up into the sky, and I had to rush to my writing-table and fasten myself to earth by starting to work at full-speed on what eventually became my first play.

This ruthlessness has left me now that war has come; or would it be more honest to say that it has been temporarily put away? For I think that if I go back to the theatre after the war I shall need it again, and in stronger degree, since there will be so much destruction to make good, and such a long, long waste of time to redeem. But for the present of course I have stopped thinking about the theatre. The theatre *is* important—to me it is all-important—but what is the use of the theatre if there are no audiences? What is the use, even, of the theatre in an invaded and subjected land, where not artistic but political and dictated rules condition its growth? Germany is proof enough that art cannot flourish without liberty of expression. And unless we win this war, it seems, there will be no liberty of expression anywhere in the world; so it is obvious that every citizen must concentrate all his effort on fighting in whatever way he may be most effectual. It doesn't seem to me a bit important that the theatres should remain open: they are essential to relaxation, I know, but there ought to be no relaxation in this country until Hitler is defeated. On the other hand it does seem to me important that acting should continue to be

taught, since the actors and actresses of the future will clearly not be able to become fully-fledged artists overnight after the war. The teaching of acting, or indeed of anything, ought to be a reserved occupation. If I did not think the plight of our country was desperate I could find the strength to become a conscientious objector on these grounds, to maintain that I should be of such value to the national civilization in reconstructing the theatre after the war that I ought to be kept alive at all costs; and I should consequently be willing to suffer the appropriate penalties. But I should feel horribly angry if I found, after suffering them, that any reconstruction I did would be for the benefit of Hitler's New World State. So I prefer to go and fight in a way which does not, perhaps, make the best use of my abilities, but is of more immediate service to the country.

I wonder if it strikes you as odd that I should constantly reaffirm like this my desire to fight and my reasons for fighting. I wonder whether, by the time you are of age, loyalty to a nation will have given place to loyalty to an idea, as it is already beginning to do, and if you will regard us who fought for England as narrow-minded relics of an outworn political system. Will a war between England and Germany seem to you as unnecessary and contemptibly pugnacious as a war between Dorset and Devonshire would seem to us? Perhaps I ought to hope so. And yet, at the present moment, before the grandeur of that conception has become apparent to us, and while yet we are entangled in its intricate and dangerous discrepancies, I cannot help shuddering at the results it has already brought about. There can never have been a time in the whole history of the world when each nation was more riddled than it is now with espionage, passive resistance, disloyalty, sabotage, and all those crimes which, for some absurd reason, we dress up under the designation of 'fifth column activities' instead of calling them by their proper name of treachery. And even when treachery is proved, the punishment for it is seldom death; it is more

often a short term of imprisonment, and then the traitor is released so that he may again pursue his criminal activities. No doubt this is very humane: but what is the consideration of one human life in comparison with the safety of the State? When I realize the comparatively large number of people who condone treachery in one form or another even in this our eleventh hour, then I do indeed despair of the British nation and begin to believe von Ribbentrop when he tells us we are a decadent race.

Perhaps I am decadent too, for I seem to stand idly by while citadel after citadel falls, not conquered by force of arms but rotted from within. If I were not decadent and gutless I should have managed somehow by now to assassinate Hitler. It would not have been insuperably difficult, really, anyhow up till the rape of Austria. I speak German well. I ought to have gone to Germany and joined the Nazi party, as I once planned to do. But I did not have the determination to carry out the plan, so I wrote a book about it instead—a bad one which was not published. That is the trouble with us all: we have forgotten how to act. When we are violently stirred we do not release our emotions in action, we write a book about them, or paint a picture, or simply talk. I ask myself whether this is because we are in fact decadent, or whether it is because, in our subconscious minds, we do not believe in the cause for which we are fighting. I do not know. Speaking for myself I think it is the former. A too easy life and the lack of physical problems have made me soft. I have not had to contend with the elements, which is one of the most character-forming trials a man can undergo. I have not really had to contend with anything except my own intellectual problems; and they were simply the result of this too-civilized life which we lead, and would have vanished overnight if I had had to wrest my living from the land or out of the sea. It has therefore been a paralysis induced by the intellect rather than a lack of ability for action. I have always approved of action, even to a point where it was

harmful. I have preferred to do something, rather than nothing. I have liked to be *in mediis rebus*. There is a story told of me when I was about four years old. I was taken to the beach to bathe, but when I saw the sea I refused to go in 'until it had stopped moving'. But though I am rather proud of the Canute-like quality of this remark, I prefer not to think it was symbolical of my attitude towards life, for, looking back now, I find that my chief joy and ambition has been to plunge into the thick of things just where they were moving most! I have never been happier than when working night and day, as one does in stock companies, or when catching boats to New York, or when trying to produce a play, act in it, *and* learn the piano all at the same time, as I did in one production. For this reason, as I have told you, I have tried never to shy away from human relationships, however bizarre they may at first have seemed. I have tried to 'walk in' on people, to get behind the barriers of convention or shyness to the *real* person, to catch them in an unguarded moment, or under the stress of some emotion when they were no longer able to play-act or prop up their little affectations in my way. There is something rather brutal in this, perhaps; you may even think it not quite decent. It is certainly not quite English: and it is also only rarely that one gets this chance. But it is fascinating. It shows our human nature as it is, and not as it sees itself. And at the present stage of my development I am still much more interested in sincerity than in character, in individual motives than in universal ones. I have envied doctors because they must so often meet people when they are suffering from anxiety, or fear, or pain, and when they can therefore no longer be bothered to hide their true natures, nor to wade through the preliminaries of social nicety before they can behave with frankness. Perhaps, though, a doctor sees so much of this that he may prefer the comparative impersonality of convention; or his professional attitude may prevent him from taking advantage of his patients' sincerity in order to make

friends of them. I don't know. I only feel in myself an intense desire to see through people's defences to their real selves. Some people, very naturally, resent this inquisitiveness of mine; but so many people, I find, are longing all the time for some kind of intimacy with another human being, and after one or two half-hearted attempts to keep their pose up they drop it altogether. And my attitude cannot be so impertinent as it seems, for it has made me some good friends, even among tradespeople and charladies, who are the most conventional of all people!

I find, now, that I have a great desire to 'get on' with people—a reaction perhaps from my 'chip-on-the-shoulder' schooldays—and this leads me to take, all unconsciously, the most immense trouble in my relations with others. I like women better than men, naturally perhaps, for they have the added fascination for me that, however much I learn about them, however hard I tax my imagination, I shall never *quite* know what it feels like to be a woman. And to a playwright and an actor there is nothing of more interest in the world than to know how other people feel. Yet I find the few friendships I have with men much more satisfactory. They are less exhausting and more straightforward. Men usually tell the truth; women nearly always tell what they would like the truth to be.

I hope you will not be as frightened of women as I was in my adolescence; but you will be better brought up than I was, so that is not likely. As my father's job kept him always abroad, I never had a proper home, for I was sent to school in England. I often wish now that I had been allowed to stay with my parents. I am sure that home life and a natural grown-up atmosphere are essential to the upbringing of children. If they are constantly herded together with other children whom they do not much care for, which happens at every boarding-school, or if they are left a great deal to themselves because they live with grown-up people who have not the patience to let them share their own lives and conversa-

tion, they are bound to grow up shy and self-conscious. I did. I remember when my father once came home on leave—I was about seventeen then—how angry he was with me because I refused every invitation to go out with other people. I don't suppose he knew the reason. To him I was simply unsociable. But it was not from arrogance that I behaved like this. On the contrary I longed, even then, to get on well with people. Unfortunately, however, the moment I came into contact with strangers I was a mass of self-consciousness and nerves. I couldn't walk across a room without imagining that all eyes were fixed disparagingly upon me. I felt I hadn't got the right clothes on, that my hair needed brushing, and that I was a bore. And my conversation would dry up completely; and I would then begin to look and say and do all those foolish things which I so much wanted to avoid. I never managed to overcome this shyness until I went to Germany, where the completely different mode of life and the fact that people were unself-conscious in their manner towards me did a good deal to break down my inhibitions. Here I began to be rather a success—what with funny accents and *naïvetés* about the language it isn't difficult for a foreigner in any country!—and I even found that people liked me. This was what chiefly opened me out at last. I had been so much disliked at school because of my non-gregarious ways that I had grown to dislike other people. When I found that these people refused to be disliked and took immense trouble to make friends with me, I was so touched that I went to the other extreme and took them to my heart one and all.

It was in Germany that I first fell in love. Will it embarrass you, I wonder, if I tell you about that? The thought of one's father having been in love—even with his wife—is always slightly shocking to the young, I know. Please don't let it shock you. Falling in love is a very natural, pleasant, and healthy process, as I hope you will discover for yourselves. Also it is a process that, anyhow in my case, can be

repeated over and over again. I have met a few people who told me they had only been in love once. I frankly don't believe them. Nature intended love primarily for the purposes of procreation, and therefore it is obviously bound to recur a certain number of times in everybody's life.

Well—I fell in love. I was staying on a big estate buried deep in the forests of Silesia, and she was the daughter of a neighbouring landowner. There was something of Turgenev in the setting and in the innocence and swiftness of our love-affair; but I had never read Turgenev then, and I thought it all highly original. There was a wooden Polish church, a strange rambling affair that looked as if it had originally been a tiny chapel, and had had pieces added to it as the congregation grew in numbers; and in this church on a hot summer afternoon up in the gallery where nobody was likely to come, I kissed her for the first time. I don't think I could ever describe that kiss to you: the half-desired, half-feared surprise of it, the gentleness, the sudden fleeting intimacy of body with someone who had been almost a stranger a moment before—when I have said all that, I have still not told you what it felt like. I think perhaps that Goethe came nearest to describing it when he said in his *Tagebuch*:

Das war ein Kuss so herzlich und so warm,
Wie Walderdbeeren hat der Kuss geschmeckt.

It *was* tender, it *was* warm. And I think it *did* taste rather like wild strawberries. The letters that we wrote each other after I had gone away were as passionate as our vocabulary allowed; what we lacked in experience we supplemented with poetic phrases, being both widely read in German romantic poetry, which is most inventive in the imagery of love. But with that our ardour had to be content.

I am bitterly sorry to think that I may not be alive when you first fall in love. Most fathers, I find, make fun of their children's love affairs, if they do not actively disapprove. I hope I should not be foolish enough to do either of these

things. On the contrary, if I erred it would be perhaps in taking a too intelligent interest; and I might run the risk of your thinking me inquisitive or worse. But it is such a delicate and important stage in one's development, and I would give so much to be able to remove for you some of the stumbling-blocks and banes which so often and so unnecessarily beset it. That is something I should have understood how to do, I like to think. Possibly I should have been a bad father to you until you were fifteen or so. I should have wanted to concentrate all my energies on my work, and each time you interfered with that, each demand you made on me, I should have resented fiercely. But when you had grown up a little and I was able to interest you in the things which I find fascinating myself, we should have had a lot to give each other, you and I. I think that in a way I sensed this when I first thought of having children, and I knew it would be very important for you to have a good mother. I hope you will agree that I chose you a splendid one.

The first years of our married life were happy, but also very hard. We came of such different people, your mother and I, our upbringings had not been at all the same, and we really had very little in common to begin with except our love for the theatre and a deep, rather inarticulate desire to cling together, which has never since deserted us, and which, I often think, is the only strength we had with which to weather the various storms of married life. It has proved a lasting and an increasing strength. Relying on it, your mother and I have been able to develop each in our own direction, individually; neither of us has pulled the other out of the ways we wished to go. I shall never know how it would have stood the test of time, of poverty, of illness, of children growing up, and of the thousand other things which make marriages totter. But as it was founded on a desire to understand and encourage one another, I do not think it would have failed us.

I wonder if I am thinking wishfully when I say I should

have made you a good father later on? I know how often there is a deep-seated, stubborn barrier between the affections of parents and of children. This dislike is almost strong enough and common enough to be called instinctive; in fact, I suppose it *is* instinctive in a way, since nature from the beginning intended children to separate from their parents and start their own communities elsewhere. Some animals obey this instinct: and man has obeyed it too, except when he was forced to stay with the herd for safety. I should have been prepared, I think, for a certain amount of hostility from you both, particularly as we are of the same sex; but I hope I should have been able to overcome this in time. Or should I have been as clumsy, I wonder, in my attempts to help you as so many fathers have been before, and will no doubt continue to be as long as shyness and inhibitions haunt the human race? I should have wanted you to know those absurd 'facts of life'—so obvious and simple once you know them—as soon as ever you could understand them. I should have wanted you to inquire into life, into every fact and aspect of it, as soon as ever you began to feel you were living. I should have done my best not to let you spend the first seventeen years of your life wrapped in protective cotton-wool, as I did. I should have liked to take you to hear music and see pictures in the right way, that is under no compulsion *nor* with the feeling that you were enjoying a solemn Sunday treat, but because music and pictures are food for the imagination and therefore a necessity for the soul. If you had continually heard good music 'accidentally' in your home: if our big painting of Saint Tropez Harbour by Hayter had always hung in the studio so that you had grown to love it as we did, and to miss it if it were removed—surely you would then have had a feeling for the elementary principles and power of art which would have been quite genuine and as much a thing of your everyday concern as eating or exercise.

I should have tried to show you beauty in the things

around you, in the pink fog of a November evening, or the yellow plane-tree leaves in Ladbroke Square, or the huge façade and volcanic smoke-plume of the Battersea power-station. I have so often soothed myself through an hour of pain or melancholia or that dreadful impotence of spirit which assails me when I cannot work, by listening to music, or looking at a drawing, or walking through wet beech-woods, or reading Donne or Shelley, or the robust and vivid Chesterton. Each of these has beauty for me, and can give it to me whenever I want it, unstintingly. Poetry I have found more soothing than any other form of beauty, perhaps because it is more concentrated; or at least the poetry I like—passionate and rich in compressed imagery—is more soothing. But after all, beauty is to be found in so many things: in women, in clouds, in thoughts. It is a quality that invests, perhaps, an action or a word. It is something we can live on and should live for. It is something we can point out and so bequeath to a friend, although we may not be able to describe it or to separate it from the word, the action, or the woman it invests. It is a way of thought. It is a way of life.

FIVE

The 'all clear' is sounding now, an encouraging clarion in the lemon-coloured morning. Dawn is on its way: soon the light outside will be stronger than the light inside the room, and there will be no harm in my drawing back the curtains. I wonder how much damage the raiders have done, whether Saint Paul's or the National Gallery or the Greenwich Museum or Hampton Court, or any of my other favourite buildings, have been blown into the air, to descend again a heap of smouldering rubble, shorn of the beauty which has invested them for several hundred years. The horizon is streaked with red, as if somewhere out of sight below the rim there flamed a fierce and inextinguishable fire. Is it Woolwich Arsenal, I wonder, or the pyre of some luckless invader? Or is it perhaps the sun? All is peaceful near the house. The birds, which had started singing before ever the 'all clear' gave them permission, have suddenly stopped again, as they often do when the daylight begins to strengthen. Or were they frightened by the noise of that new electric eagle in their midst?

Morgenrot, Morgenrot,
Leuchtet mir zum frühen Tod.¹

There is such universality of feeling amongst those about to die that I find myself quoting the poetry of my enemy to describe my own condition. I am not exactly ashamed of doing this, but I certainly feel a little self-conscious about it; just as, when I was digging a shelter in the garden the week that war was declared and found myself singing a Schumann song in German, I stopped instinctively, wondering what impression I should be making on our fat little neighbour

¹ 'The red glow of dawn shall light me to an early death.'

next door—and then went on again, louder than ever, just to show her I didn't care. But now I understand well enough why in the last war (and already there are signs of it in this) feeling should run so high against all things German, even against those most ungermanic Germans, Mozart and Bach and Dürer. I hate having to admit it, but I believe it to be a useful thing—for ordinary people. A man who hasn't the intelligence to differentiate between a musician and a German ought to train himself to hate the musician lest in loving the musician he should condone the German. Even in my own case, I believe the singing of a German song is not devoid of harm. Take 'Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren' for instance: it happens to remind me of a holiday I spent on the Chiem See near Munich—my honeymoon in fact—during which I was happier than I had been for many years, and the magic of which has still not faded from my recollection. Each time I sing it my store of mounting hatred for the enemy is lessened by remembrance of his kindness and of the beauty of the land which he inhabits.

'But how right!' you will say. 'How desirable it is that this should be so! If we do not cling to those things which we have in common, to our love of beauty and our preference for kindness over brutality, how shall we ever meet again after the war? What starting-ground shall we ever find from which to set out together to reconstruct the world?'

That is true, of course. The more our hatred mounts the worse the peace will be, to judge at any rate by the analogy of Versailles. And yet: and yet! We are fighting for our very existence: I am in no doubt whatever about that. And all the fine sentiments in the world will be of little use to us when we are dust, or when we are the slaves and our women the chattels of a ruthless and perverted lust for power. I cannot help feeling it is better to hate the Germans and to win the war than to love them and to lose it. For I don't think there

can be two ways about it. War is vile, certainly, therefore avoid it if possible:

... but, being in,
Bear't that th' opposed may beware of thee.

If one's enemy is neither chivalrous nor even reasonably merciful, it is equivalent to suicide to behave towards him in a chivalrous or merciful fashion. There are plenty of people, I know, who consider this form of suicide nobler than self-defence, nobler even than defence of their country, their institutions, their civilization, or their wives and children. But I am not one of them, alas! I wish I were. How simple all the issues would become!

In this morning's post I find a little grey card which commands me to report at an Infantry Training Centre, —, by four o'clock on the afternoon of the 27th of June. I had not expected it quite so soon. I had hoped to have about a week in which to tie up the loose ends of my untidy life. Now I have precisely forty-eight hours, for my train leaves London exactly forty-eight hours from this moment. For forty-eight hours longer I may continue my existence as myself; after that I must put away my individuality, my friends, my hopes, and my responsibilities, and become the slave of a vast relentless war-machine. It is a willing, even a joyful immolation. But it *is* an immolation, a conscious sacrifice of all I have lived for up till now. I am not going with any feeling of exultation, nor have I any illusions about the gloriousness of war. My joy at going is caused simply by the feeling that I have stood too long shivering on the brink; and, as I told you, I like to jump into things with both feet: I prefer to take *some* decision even if it be the wrong one. And there is actually a certain satisfaction about this decision, for I have not taken it at all; it has been taken for me, and I am not responsible to my spirit for the possible evil results of it.

I can see the grim smile that will cross the lips of my paci-

first friend if he should ever read this. 'Which of us now is the coward?' he will ask. 'Which of us now is sheltering behind a false, an intellectual motive?'

Well, I cannot think clearly at the moment and so, perhaps, his accusation may be just. But my answer is that I do not actually believe that this decision will have an evil effect upon my spirit; whereas I am almost sure that my spirit would utterly degenerate if I locked it into the prison of his pacifism.

Forty-eight hours to live! Now at last I know what it is like to be a condemned man. I have often wondered: I have asked myself what I should feel if I were condemned to death by a doctor, say, or by a judge, or, as possibly now, by some deep conviction of my own. I have tried to imagine the thoughts and feelings I should have, the things I should want to do before I died, the people I should want to see. When I was about twenty-one I used to want to ski down a long and perfect slope in moonlight before I died. A couple of years later I wanted to die in the arms of the girl I adored most fervently at the time. Then I wanted to write a magnificent (and of course successful) play about my last hours of life. But all that, I fear, was only play-acting. Now that I am actually faced with death—if not with physical death (and there is a chance of that too), then at any rate with the death of that spirit, that individual who at present lives and thinks and moves with my faculties—I do not feel a bit as I did in my carefully worked-out day-dreams. I do not feel in the least excited; I do not even feel afraid. When I heard those German aeroplanes last night I laughed—and I was alone in this room, so I don't think I did it for effect. There is some wretched quality in me that enables me to stand outside myself all the time and observe myself dispassionately. So my first thought on hearing the aeroplanes was of the futility and wastefulness to which my last ten years of striving would have been reduced by one single bomb on the right spot. When I think of the struggle, the fear, the joy, the hoping, the despondency, the effort, the protestations of

love and the pragmatic assertions of one belief after another --all reduced to a little pile of cinders by one bomb! And my faith in the future, my eagerness to reconstruct the world after the war on a nobler, a more Christian scale, my determination that the British Commonwealth must win this war, my pathetic oath never to act in the theatre again until Hitler is defeated: what ridiculous mincemeat the thought of that one bomb made of it all!

One of the beings of whom, after you and your mother, I am fondest in all the world has been swallowed up in the invasion of France by the Germans. I know of no address for her except in Paris, which she left months ago. The village to which I believe she fled--'evacuated' she would have called it at that time--has been overrun by the Nazis, and according to the paper they have driven their tanks right along its main street, machine-gunning its inhabitants. I have heard no word of her, nor shall I, perhaps, ever again: I cannot go and find her, I cannot write to her, nor get in touch with anyone who may know where she is. She is a young girl, scarcely grown up, and she will, if she is alive, be suffering terribly in her mind, perhaps also in her body, because of the humiliation of her beloved country. And there is nothing I can do about it: nothing, absolutely nothing. Yet I do not weep. Is it, I wonder, because I cannot? I am not even trying to borrow a boat, to steal a plane, with which to make the desperate attempt to find her. I am merely standing outside myself and saying, 'You are suffering dreadfully. But you do not show it. Until these words are read no one will know what you are suffering now. How interesting that is! But then of course you are an actor: you are accustomed to controlling your emotions. And you are a writer: you can write about them and release them in that way. How lucky you are, how interesting it is, how lucky, how interesting, how lucky, how interesting...' God! God! I would cry out with anguish, if the pain were not so intense that it inhibits even weeping.

No words, no music, no poetry even will ever express the immensity of suffering which the world is enduring to-day. There can scarcely be a corner of the globe that does not shrink under the shadow of this misery. Nowhere, nowhere, except perhaps in the dim and frozen stillnesses of pack-ice round the poles, nowhere is there any refuge from this illness of the world. We must endure it, each one of us, for each one of us is a member of that 'body evolutionary' which is now so very sick that I occasionally wonder whether it is going to recover this time or not. It has a chance, I know. There's plenty of good blood and many strong red corpuscles in its veins still. But has it the *will* to live? God, tell me, *has* it the will to live? Or is it so desperately and insanely diseased that it will inevitably destroy itself?

I have seen my last ten years' work made futile: I have lost all my money, my house, my books, my pictures and my car: yesterday I parted from my wife and children, never, for all I know, to see them again: this morning I have admitted to myself that I have lost a beloved friend; and to-morrow perhaps I shall muster up enough cynicism to admit that I have lost myself. What else *can* I do but continue to stand outside myself and observe it all as an interesting process in the tempering of a human soul? If I allowed myself to *feel* for that soul I should go mad with pity; for that soul is not so very different from a million other souls which are being tempered in the same torment, and if I feel for one soul I must feel for them all. And *that* I have neither the all-embracing love nor the strength to do. That I suppose is what Christ did. He felt in himself the pain and misery of each human being with whom he came in contact, and perhaps too, in some way, of many whom he never even met, and he could embrace all their misery and accept it, and yet not lose his own soul nor his sanity under the crushing burden of it.

So I am not particularly moved when I find myself condemned to death. I do not make frantic plans for a glorious

or a wicked or a dignified demise. I do not order a magnificent meal, nor a father-confessor, nor pipes of opium to dull the pain of my last hours of thought. I am quite calm. I stand outside myself. I think of my friends, the few whom I have really loved, some of whom perhaps, if the judge had given me another week of life, I might have managed to visit just once more. But even had I had the time, I wonder if I should have gone to see them? There are such barriers of misery between us now that our eyes scarcely dare to meet, lest one of us should betray to the other his dreadful wretchedness. Our hands touch: but they are lifeless and cold. Each of us forces them to be so, afraid lest they should speak too loudly of trembling nerves and tortured sinews. We embrace: but our arms do not dare to clasp too strongly lest they should grapple and never let go.

No! I am *glad* that I have only been given forty-eight hours. It is just long enough to tidy up my business and to get my kit together. I shall write one or two letters, to people who are far away, to you and to your mother. I shall turn the key in the lock of my individual mind, and leave without even a backward glance.

At one time, when I was cruelly in love with someone who I could never hope would love me, I thought of committing suicide, as most people do in similar circumstances. It was not so much that I wanted to die: it was that I could not manage to live the life I valued, the life of the spirit and of the imagination, without her presence and her love. Yet my *life* did not seem a sufficient sacrifice to my love for her, nor the taking of it a sufficiently final alleviation for the pain I felt. Besides, even in those days, the prospect of war was never far distant, and I felt that with so much fighting to be done a life—even my life—ought not to be wantonly and ineffectually thrown away.

So it was a kind of *spiritual* suicide that I committed. I stifled my desire for good, my faith in the future, my love for my friends, and all the aspirations towards beauty for

which I had struggled until then. I killed all hope in myself, and abandoned my mind to every nihilistic and destructive concept I came in contact with. And the strange and paradoxical result of all this was—to make me write poetry! Out of the murdering of my spirit was created a new form of life for my spirit, a spontaneous and vigorous regeneration of all that I had most desired to kill. Life, it seems, refuses to be destroyed, and will flower most strongly just when we think it can be most easily suppressed.

In a letter to me about an anthology of new poems which he is bringing out this month, a writer whom I have already quoted to you expresses this same thought. He says:

‘Whatever valleys of darkness man has to travel between now and the new age, our greatest consolation must be that we can face it because man as a kind is rooted in endurance of all things for his vision’s sake. My own conviction is that the arts all prove this, and poetry proves this. These poems are all of them evidence that poetry *must* function in man, even in dreadful darkness. If people are writing poetry now, then that is enough to show that the forces of war will never abolish the fineness of man’s nature altogether.’

SIX

Although I haven't yet actually severed my ties with civilian life, I feel like a man in a railway carriage, who doesn't really belong anywhere. He isn't at his place of departure, and he hasn't yet reached his destination. He doesn't even belong in the railway carriage, which only harbours him for a specific purpose and a limited length of time. I have felt like this ever since war broke out, and if it hadn't been physically impossible to get into any of the forces I should have joined up months ago. In some respects I have felt like this for years. I have not been quite sure where I was going nor where I wished to go. Shortly before war broke out, however, I did discover more or less what route I wanted to travel, though I was still not very sure where I intended to end up. So I determined to settle down in London and write when I wasn't acting. We took the house next door, as our own was getting too small to hold us all, and in it I installed myself, with a room full of my books and my pictures, which was exclusively and sacredly my own. Neither of you was to be allowed near it; even your mother was only to come into it for very special reasons. In this room I felt truly happy and at home for the first time. As I have explained to you, my private life is not much mixed up in my mind with the work I do, and so I used to find it very difficult to work when you two, or even your mother, were about. I envy and admire Bach the detachment which enabled him to write such perfect music while his children laughed or howled around him, or crawled all over his manuscripts; but I don't think that in a hundred years I could ever acquire it myself.

By freeing myself from domesticity in order to work I found that I also freed my mind from my work in order to be domestic; and I began for the first time actually to *enjoy*

having two not always sunny-tempered children! I didn't any longer have the feeling when I was playing with you that I ought to be working, nor, when I was working, was I any longer attacked by fears that I was behaving unkindly towards my family. I had come to satisfactory terms with both my family and my artistic life. I had acquired a certain peace of mind. I had, so to speak, just opened a new ream of paper and taken up my pen—when war broke out.

I won't bore you with a catalogue of the things I had intended to write: besides, I may write them some day, after all, and you will be able to read them for yourselves. But as I believe that the only true way of judging any artist is by the whole volume of his work rather than by any individual instance of it, you may imagine how galling it is to me that I shall inevitably be judged (if at all) by the one rather immature novel and the one play that I have written, and not by all the books and plays which I intended to write and at least three of which are even now completed in my head, only I haven't got the time to write them down.

'More time! more time! Faustus' cry, the scholar's plea!'—how does Aldington put it?

Since then I have had a dreadful urge to take every chance which offered of leaving some imprint, however feeble or imperfect, of my mind upon the world's memory. I believe that this was in reality my strongest incentive to teaching, for, even in the short time I had, it seemed to me possible to hand on to someone who might fulfil them the ambitions and discoveries which I myself had not been able to pursue to their conclusion. In practice it did not prove very easy. The academy at which I taught is an old-fashioned institution, and there were (and still are) so many cobwebs to be swept away there that neither I, nor any of the other young and progressive instructors, have as yet managed to do much more than sweep. We have not yet begun to build; and my heart rebels against having to leave my work there at this of all moments.

When you grow up and first feel the strength of your young manhood, when your bodies answer magnificently every call that your brains can make upon them and you first begin to aspire towards power over men, I hope you will remember the tragic lack of vision which the present generation has shown in so many countries of the world, and profit by its folly. I pray that you will not let yourselves be mauled by ancient sex-repressed psychologists, nor imprisoned in 'isms' by exponents of the various ideologies, nor led by the nose by newspaper-men, nor coarsened into beasts by fanatics with a lust for power. I beg you not to sacrifice your ideals for the sake of king, country, wife, life, or profit, but to maintain them in the face of all opposition that may be set up against them, and in spite of whatever rust of apathy or laziness may attempt to corrode them.

Not long ago I discovered myself taking a pride in being a 'practical man', a man who, though he considered himself an idealist, was always willing to whittle down his ideals to a point at which they were capable of immediate realization. I don't know what induced this attitude in me. I suppose it was forced on me by the sheer necessity of 'getting things done'. When my enthusiasms set me a task and my ideals insisted on the highest point of accomplishment for it, I would find, as often as not, that I achieved nothing at all. The ideal appeared unattainable, and anything below it was not to be tolerated; so I would sit and gaze at the impossibly high mountain and never get as far as climbing it. To counteract this unproductive state of affairs I took to demanding a little less of myself than the ideal, and this system apparently produced some results. I got one foot on to the mountain, so to speak. This was an excellent sop to my self-respect; it gave me the impression that I was achieving something. I persuaded myself even that I was achieving my ideal goal, that my 'whittling down', my compromising and conceding, was taking me along the road I wished to travel.

I hereby solemnly denounce this attitude of mind as one

of the most dangerous menaces now rampant. It is vicious in its origins and pernicious in its results. It rots the fibre of a man's endeavour and threatens the actual bases of civilization. It is one of the chief causes of our present catastrophe. Significantly enough, it is unknown at the moment in Germany, whose motive and method of war may be contemptible, but whose conduct of it is admirable in the extreme. I beseech you never to succumb to the attraction of its expediency. For it does *not* take you along your intended road; it only keeps you at the roadside, staring at those who are really travelling, and imagining that because you can see them moving you are moving too.

There is more positive value in consciously doing nothing than in going half-way towards an ideal in this manner. The former represents an emphatic, even a constructive, attitude of mind, and the latter represents nothing but a weak will which is ready to go with the stream. I think that, in my case, this weakmindedness arose originally from a fear of offending people; until recently I hated rows and would go to any lengths of self-lumiliation to avoid them. But I do not hate them now. I have discovered that a clear-cut and emphatic attitude of mind, even if it be wrong-headed, inspires more respect than an easy concession to other people's demands. To you, I hope, this will be obvious: you will have read about Mr. Chamberlain and the 'Treaty of Munich'. But I have had to find it out for myself; for, with the best of intentions, I misled myself for several years by trying to interpret literally Christ's injunction to 'turn the other cheek'. Now I have realized the mistakefulness of this, I am back where I began.

I started out in life determined to 'be myself'. I was not quite sure what this meant: it was a result of innate ambition, I think, and of the motto my godfather had engraved for me on my christening-cup—'What a man thinks, that he is'. And perhaps of my reading between the ages of sixteen and twenty. I found I had no originality of mind.

My religion, my morals, my artistic appreciation, my love of literature, were all spoon-fed; yet many of my friends were thinking things out for themselves and occasionally arriving at quite astoundingly original conclusions. I determined not to be outdone by them. I determined to think everything out for myself, to accept nothing that I could not test by my own experience or by the experience of someone whom I trusted. Bertrand Russell and Bernard Shaw, those iconoclasts, helped me a good deal. (I do not read either of them with much satisfaction now: but I swallowed them avidly then.) Out of this grew my determination to approach every aspect of experience from my own direction: it is an intention which I have fulfilled fairly successfully in the last ten years. I have 'been myself'. What I have thought, that I was. If now, like Peer Gynt, I peeled away my various skins, I believe I *should* find a small core of personality which was strongly and unmistakably myself. It is this core of personality that I hope you will each of you try to develop in yourselves.

I have thought a great deal about how children ought to be brought up. Although you have neither of you been on this earth for very long, your mother and I have discussed the question very thoroughly. Naturally we have judged the problems of education by the results that education had on us. Some of the things we discussed for you your mother may possibly be able to give you: some of them, no doubt, this war will make impossible of achievement. If I had had more time before war broke out, I should have saved enough money and so reorganized my life that you could have been brought up in the depths of the country.

After the age of ten you would have been rigorously trained in the use of your minds, and this would have continued until you were old enough to go to a university, when you would not have been sent to Oxford or to Cambridge, but to some university abroad. Here you would have studied foreign languages and foreign people, I should have expected

you to make all your worst mistakes and to overcome all the gaucheries of youth. After this you would have returned home for a course in some English university, and then you would have had to adopt a profession. I ought to add that never, from the moment when you first began to talk, would you have been treated by us in a childish manner, or made to feel that you were anything but not-so-grown-up grown-ups. I admit that this method would occasionally have made life difficult for us and perhaps a little perplexing for you. But we should have had our own existences to retire into when you seemed to intrude too much upon us.

Do you think that with this sort of education (I need hardly say that you would *not* have gone to any form of boarding-school) you would have developed independence of mind? I like to think so. I like to believe that children can educate each other pretty well; and that in natural circumstances parents are the best guides and companions that children can have. I do not, of course, call the town life of the present day, with its traffic, shams, cinemas, poky flats, and boarding-schools a natural form of life. In fact I sometimes hope in secret that air-raids will prove an effective means of dispersing our populations over the length and breadth of the land again. If this ever happens, and if enough of us are still alive after the war, we may perhaps not find it so difficult to live a more peaceful and so a fuller existence in the future than we do now.

I have been writing all through the night, and it is now four in the morning of the 27th of June. I put out the light for a few minutes and drew back the curtains a short while ago, and opened the french windows and went out into the garden. The sky was full of the noise of aeroplanes—our own presumably, since there has been no alarm to-night—and the searchlights were not active. The stars were already beginning to fade; the air had, strangely enough, that

peculiar scent of cattle and sweet grass that I had always until to-night thought typical of the Alps. There are no cattle, nor is there much sweet grass in London. I wonder where that scent is coming from! It reminds me of the summer holidays I have spent in Bavarian villages, of the all-night tinkling of the cow-bells, and of the carved wooden houses with cinerarias and petunias all along their overhanging balconies. 'The Germany that I loved!'—such a good title for so many books which have recently been written. And such an ironical one! Never, I imagine, has there been a country with more potential friends that *less* desired to be loved.

I find it difficult to realize that in three hours more I shall cease to be myself, that self whom I have so struggled to find and whom I have only lately begun to know. When the war first broke out I welcomed the thought of joining up, of submerging my individuality in the ranks of a regiment, of becoming a nonentity with a number instead of an entity with a name. I felt I understood why T. E. Lawrence had become Aircraftsman Shaw, and why poets joined up in the ranks of the International Brigade. Obviously, I thought, they had wrestled for so long with the contesting forces of personality and artistic endeavour inside themselves that they were heartily sick of their individuality, and welcomed the possibility of casting it off and merging themselves in the herd.

But during the last nine months, while war has been in progress all round me and on many battle-fronts, I have changed my views. Each day has brought a tale of some new achievement of gallantry, some violent and glorious expression of individuality. No war has so prodigally offered opportunity to the individual as this one: officer or private, pilot or gunner, patriot or traitor, each has had his chance to make his name revered or loathed more widely than ever before. The publicity is universal, the issues at stake are colossal and far-reaching.

So I have lately grown attached again to this personality of mine which has always given me so much trouble in the past, and I now find myself fretting at the thought of losing it behind a number and a set of regulations. I suppose that as I put on my uniform I shall say good-bye to my old self. I shall have to forget all those things which have meant so much to me up till now, and, shorn of desire and of feeling, concentrate every atom of my strength on developing myself into a good but mere machine.

Now, youth, the hour of thy dread passion comes:
Thy lovely things must all be laid away.

As with many other wars that have been fought, we go to fight that there may be no war again. How many twisted smiles this statement must conjure up on the bony lips of those who died in Flanders in the 1914 war! And in how many eager innocent minds of future soldiers will this same conviction burn, I wonder? Who can tell whether my pacifist friend may not be right, after all, to seek a positive result by his new method of dealing with the disease of war, and whether I am not once more simply whittling down my ideals to a point of practicability? I shall never know. But my instinct to fight is so strong that it in some measure simplifies the problem for me. And I would rather trust to this powerful instinct in a tight corner, than to any concept of intellectual love; for intellectual love has proved itself so tragically unable to comprehend the forces of evil.

SEVEN

It is broad daylight now. The town is awaking to life. I can hear the clatter of a dust-cart a few streets away, and the hollow ringing of the emptied bins. One or two cars have roared up the hill, sounding like aeroplanes in the still morning, and there is a busy pulse of feet along the street.

But the house is still asleep, its eyelids closed against the strengthening light. It is as if it did not *want* to wake up, as if it were trying, ostrich-fashion, to escape sorrow by refusing to see it. I cannot find it in my heart to blame it. It is foolishness, but it is a dear foolishness. It arouses a feeling of tenderness in me as I watch it; it is so trustful, like a tired child asleep. I should like to sit here for a long while yet, *my* window open, *my* eye watchful, to ward away the shock of its awakening. Or better still to lull it into sleep for ever. Why need it wake from such a peaceful sleep, only perhaps to be hurled violently back again into oblivion by a German bomb? I should like to sit here for ever, with the first sunlight stealing across the lawn, and that blackbird scattering dew from the leaves of the lilac tree.

But Mephistopheles has waited long enough, and he is growing impatient. For a little longer, an hour perhaps, Faustus may solace himself with his dreams, may repine at what he left undone, at the poems he never wrote and the lips he did not kiss. For a little longer he may imagine himself a free man, the master of his soul, a visionary, a god teeming with the power of creation. But Mephistopheles lurks behind the pillars of his thought, and swings his evil censer through the vaults of his imagination.

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade.

I feel as if I were talking to two people who are separated from me by thick plate-glass. You cannot hear what I am saying and so your faces are expressionless, though I can see you quite plainly and I have some sort of confidence that, sooner or later, you *will* hear the words I speak. But by then, alas! it may be too late for you to answer; you may shout as loud as you can, I shall not hear: or if I do hear you may never know that I have heard. I wish I could believe in survival after death; but the only form of it that seems to me in the least credible is that form of 'continuity of energy' which a piano wire will give off when it is struck, or the extent to which an electric wave will continue to vibrate after it has left the transmitter. Obviously if the blow on the wire, or the energy behind the transmitter, is powerful enough, the sound or the wave will continue to make itself felt for a long period: or if a human being has lived or loved or hated violently, the vibrations that these strong feelings of his have set up may continue for a while to be perceptible to people who are still alive, even though he himself may be dead. Only it is not the human being but the energy released by him that survives; and then only for a time. This would fairly satisfactorily account for ghosts, especially as ghosts are so often lovers or murderers or sufferers of some sort—in other words 'violent feelers'. I have only had three or four genuine ghostly experiences myself, and each one of them has been explainable according to this theory.

No doubt I ought to weigh most carefully every word that I write down; for if I do reach that disputed barricade it will seem to you, on reading this, as if I had returned from it for an inexplicable moment specially to speak to you; and you will be pardonably disappointed if I don't bring back with me some great and epoch-making truth. I am sorry to think that I shall have to disappoint you. But I can do nothing to avoid this, for great truths are not stumbled upon by accident, they are only discovered by long and patient and often

heart-breaking search. Towards the end of my natural life I do feel I might have achieved a certain degree of insight, at any rate into truths which affect the workings of the human heart or the artistic mind. But at the age of twenty-nine I can only tell you that rock-like sincerity, even if it be humiliating—which it only is to the 'foolish proud'—is the quality of spirit which seems to me the most desirable for a human being to achieve. It is also most difficult to achieve, because it must mean losing one's soul before one can find it again, giving up each desire, each greed, ambition, pride, and affectation, taking out each secret shelf of one's character, examining and dusting it and replacing it only if it is strong enough to bear its load of human sorrow.

So I hope that you will never take anything on trust. Try to test each piece of knowledge you may glean from other people in the intercourse of life against your own experience.

Accept nothing, believe nothing, until a belief forces itself upon you, forces its roots into every cavity of your consciousness, and becomes an integral part of your way of thought. If you develop more quickly than I did, you might well begin your training in scepticism while you are still at school. You will be a pest to your friends of course! But you must not be afraid of this. If they are true friends they will put up with you; if they are not, let them go their sweet ways. Remain a sceptic for ten or fifteen years: crystallize your beliefs and your intentions at the age of thirty. If you are like me you will resent having to do even this. It seems a conscious limitation of one's mental powers, an insult to one's spirit, to round off one's development in this arbitrary manner. But remember that a man only lives once, and he only lives for about seventy years; so that if he ever intends to achieve and perfect a way of living or of working he will *have* to restrict his talents and sensitivity to the sphere in which they will be most effectual. I do not mean that at the age of thirty you must cease to take any further interest in life or to modify

your philosophy or your beliefs. On the contrary, I hope you will go on doing this until you die. But it seems to me that, just as a writer must crystallize his style before he can effectively convey what he wants to say, so one must crystallize one's way of living before one can live life fully and constructively. Naturally, a writer's style alters and strengthens as a result of his experience; and we may find our way of life altering and growing fuller as we acquire more skill in living. We may even find that at the age of thirty we chose wrongly, and that our style was after all not the most suited to our subject-matter. If that should happen, it seems to me, we ought to have the wisdom and the courage to abandon it at once, however old and set in our ways we may have become, and to start again from a new beginning. It will be almost insuperably difficult. We shall weep tears of impotence and despair at the realization that we once made so fundamental a mistake. But it *can* be done, for it *has* been done.

When you are confronted with an impossible task, ask yourselves always whether you are the first who have ever had to achieve it. Almost certainly you will not be. The records of our history go back nearly seven thousand years. In that time neither man's nature nor his relative circumstances have changed so very greatly. Almost certainly there will have been men or women before you who were faced with the same task, and who had less certainty than you that it could be accomplished; yet they did accomplish it. So it should not be so hard for you as it was for them, who came before you. You will have their example. They had only their courage, and their faith in the omnipotence of man.

For man is omnipotent. There is no goal he can imagine in the realm of mind which he cannot reach sooner or later in the realm of matter. There is no force yet discovered which is strong enough to foil him: through his children he can overcome even the apparent finality of death. There is

no fear so potent that it will for ever deter him, nor any suffering so great that he cannot endure it for his spirit's sake. In him is every quality that he attributes to his gods: beauty, wisdom, omniscience, omnipotence, divinity. There is even immortality.

FAREWELL TO 1939

Now the murk
Of evil thinking and obscene desire
Smothers the fire
That lit the spirit's crystal. Alike work,

Glib joy and thought,
And wine and laughter and the artist's gift
Fail, now, to lift
The barriers of despair! Our lives are sport

For madmen's lust;
And that strong hope which cried to us to build,
Mute, unfulfilled,
Has tasted stronger wisdom in the dust.

We must descend:
It is our penance for the foolish proud;
We shall weep loud
Before our silence signifies the end.

We must submit,
Must buy with death a life already spent;
We must consent,
Worshipping love, to make a mock of it.

How shall we live,
Since now our very heart-beats are not free?
What future see,
When there is nothing left but life to give?

Many must die,
Yet there'll be some for whom death's not the end,

Who shall extend
Their lives beyond this swift mortality.

Many must die,
Yet there'll be some from whom the gift of living
Is lesser giving
Than loss of long-loved friends: of these am I.

For this I hold:
Friendship is more than life, longer than love;
And it shall prove
Warmth to the spirit when the body's cold.

December 1939

'Fear No More', Camb. Univ. Press.

RELUCTANTLY, REMORESFULLY

Reluctantly, remorsefully,
Youth creeps up the path of pain,
Stumbles once or twice on love,
Loses it again.

Sorrowfully, helplessly,
Watches every beauty die,
From perception's rarest truth
Ferrets out the lie.

Courageously, ^rpathetically,
Day by day revises faith,
Blindly eager to believe
Progress can be growth.

But the spirit cannot grow
When there is no faith to build,
The bravest vision must remain
Always unfulfilled.

There is no wisdom that can reach
Truth, if truth no answer give;
The deepest sorrow cannot teach
Beauty how to live.

Helplessly, remorselessly,
Youth creeps up the path of pain,
Stumbles, now and then, on love,
Loses it again.

March 1942

THE UNPROUD FLAME

'There are times when the body yearns
And the mind must say, 'Be still,
There is no fulfilment';
When each swift, soft word
Burns in the memory, when the touch
Of each lovely movement remembered turns
Cold will into flame,
And the mind must repeat, 'Be still,
There is no fulfilment'.

There have been mornings breaking on the foreland
In scattered pearl, each one its own fulfilment,
When the gorse
Has swept like a yellow sea-wind across the moorland,
White sun white clouds shadowing,
And the horses,
Whinnying pleasure in the dappled morning, stepped
Like poised birds along the cliff edge,
Carrying gods between the wheeling warnings
Of the seagulls soaring in and out of their high follies
And the gay markets pitched
By daffodils far down in the wet valleys.

There have been cradled afternoons
Of sunlight rocking upon water,
Of willows swinging in a wide slow arc
Their lazy hands across the summer clock,
Of swallows mocking—
Kissing and mocking at their shadows on the water—
Of women singing
Their longing for the nightfall, knowing
That darkness like an eager river flowing
Brings them fulfilment.

There have been nights
Of moonlight dreaming on pale beaches,
Of black rocks sleeping
Like caverns in the memory of the sun,
Of little inquisitive winds that waken, filling
The secret shadows of embracing limbs,
And spilling
Wet silver from the heavy awnings.
On nights like these the scurry and search of wind,
The shuttle of the water weaving
Its slow history on the luminous sand,
Being also love's speeches
Secret as touch and intimate as breathing,
Like the touch and search of a beloved hand
Have brought fulfilment.

Why do you remember
Those nights and the long afternoons
And the vivid mornings,
If now the body fears and the will insists
There must be no fulfilment?
Why do you torment
The shadows sleeping in the quiet awnings,
Despising the unproud flame, self-deceiving,
Mocking the slow shuttle weaving, the blind
Strong search of the body, the night's fulfilling?

There will come a time
When the flame will awaken, defying,
When the memory spilling
From pools of inquisitive touch and the burning
Of lips in the shuttered mind
Will insist too much.

London, May 1942

'SEPTEMBER 3RD 1939'

Our sky is darkened. Our prodigious will
To good succumbs now to malignant lust.
Solace is futile; and more futile still
The ostrich-scorn, the 'civilized' disgust
Which, by despising, stimulated ill,
Strengthened in *us* its roots, bred self-distrust,
Stifled the voice which could have warned, until
Our pitiful only cry is, 'Fight we must!'

Let there be pride in battle then, for we
Redeem to-day a shame not known before,
We that lived dormant, like a winter tree
When the sap falls, spending past seasons' store
To buy a fool's sleep that we might not see
Too soon the approaching Gorgon-face of war.

September 1939

PROSPECT OF HARVEST

For the late Lieutenant William Rose, R.N.

And so you are gone. And so there'll be one heart less
To ache for lost man, one labourer less to reap
The pain-ripened harvest when suns once again shall bless.
Our loss is too soon: for the silences still are deep
Between man and man. The clutch and the lease of hope,
Pulse of our age, have torn deep through the web of soul;
And terrified man in the planet's dark envelope
Loses love, loses life, finds death not the part but the whole.

'Yet there'll be harvest!' That vision at least was strong
In your eager mind, with its ravenous pity for men.
'There will be harvest: and we, who foresee the wrong
And accept now its strife and its pain, shall be reapers then
So you taught, and we dreamed, while the hemispheres
 slotted war,
And ships which had seemed to you prisons in days of peace,
Endowed with a sudden high purpose, were prisons no more
But altars of England, guards of her singleness.

The winters of war have outlasted you. Ships have slid
Like suns from the sea's horizon, and now are held
In the green globe captive till Judgement: you with their dead,
Rebellious no doubt in death, as in life you rebelled.
'Fate has altered the plot, but action and thought are still
 mine
And character's of my making! Let honky-tonk death
Keep from sight in the wings till I've spoken my final
 line. . . .'
So you talked, and we hoped, while continents held their
 breath.

The half-worlds have clashed: the continents gasp in their
pain—

—Their pain that's no longer yours. 'There is peace I find
On this wild Atlantic under the singing rain,
In the red-lit dark, in the sea-wet fury of wind:
There is peace, and there's one thing more: thought and
action are mine!'

So you wrote, and we—we were silent, knowing you gone
With your curses and laughter into the bubble of green,
With your love for an England that curses and laughs—and
fights on.

February 1942

THE MANTLE

Recruits are issued with dead soldiers' stock;
Field-muddied webbing, brasswork that must mock
Our novice hopes to get it clean.
No tragedy in that: what of the shock
At this first splash of blood I've seen—
This ground-sheet that has warmed some dying Jock?
'Royal Scots: Dunkirk'! so reads the rune.
—Blood and a name where heroism has been.

This hero's shroud must be my living hide
To shield and warm: Pity is in this pride:
My warmth will never quicken him.
And yet by this he shall be sanctified,
Through blood, and through a bullet's whim;
And the far, uncherished agony he died,
Kindling new life as life grew dim,
Shall lift a new vision above my vision's rim.

Devon, June 1940

A. A. BATTERY

Sentry on picket—and unaccustomed power!
The slave is now a despot for an hour,
Cerberus of these clanging bars
I search all faces: the uneasy cower
Out of my bayonet's gleam, while Mars
Gloats his approval from above the watch-tower.
Oh cynic pyramid of stars
To comfort *me*, yet promise *him* new wars.

By dawn the guard-room's fetid with the heat
Of dozing men: the dubbin and sweat of feet,
Seeping through leather, have begun
Inroads on sleep. The food we had hoped to eat
After our watching should be done
Is shrivelled. Men shudder, waking. In the street
A footstep rings towards the sun
Amen to this ordeal each night undergone.

Day grows; and now the air begins to beat
With many musics. Some, scarcely heard, are sweet,
Rung in the throats of birds: but one
Is crueller, harsh, insistent, music of sleet,
Symbol of hatred never done—
The enemy's dawn patrol. And that eagle fleet
That climbs the horizon with each sun
Draws the last, deepest music from our gun.

Devon, June 1940

IN APRIL THIS EARTH

In April this earth
Can break into bud
 into laughter at will,
Printing lawn, painting shrub
With its bright-coloured mirth,
Can mockingly fill
With honey the calyx, with aloe the stem
To flutter the bees—drowsy bees—
 taunting them
For their skill-less tongues,
For sinking too deep
In the waxen forgetting,
 the warmth of their winter sleep.

Last April this earth
Could still promise gladness and tumult of harvesting,
Bulb and seed clamoured birth,
Though locked in the dark,
 though hugged in the sleep of the mound.

Last April this lawn
Could still weep its tumult, its laughter of daffodil,
The curtaining rain
Rise up from the river to cover the vivid quilt,
To set its soft prisons on tiptoe upon each blade—
 but deep in the shade

Lest the sun,
Jealous of pearls that another than he had spilt,
Should drink them to nothing, to air, at his own sweet will.

And can *this* be April—
New lease of the year and laughter's rebirth—
Here where earth
That once clamoured answer is spent and scattered,

No blade, no thrust in the clod?
And even the soft evocation of rain
Foments no tumult but that which is spattered
On shrub and flower—
The tumult of mud.
Sole grant from heaven not sunlight: a bomb;
And earth's travail a mock to the bees that waken,
A dismay to the sad daffodil.

Summer 1941

SO DEEP THE PAIN LIES

So deep the pain lies
Neither love nor sorrow has found it yet,
Hushed in a dryness that defies
Even the unfastidious jet
Of warm, wet
Pity. . . . In the guarded eyes
No lifting of vigour, no glint, no wings,
No hope, that springs
So damned eternal in commoner things.

A spirit that dies
In a curtained room,
A pilgrim, for whom
There is no flattery in the lies
Which faith the cheap-jack can devise
To stretch the finality of the tomb.

Spring 1941

CITY IN SHADOW

‘To one who has been long in city pent’—

But you, John Keats, escaped; and we’re still here
Serving this century’s imprisonment

Amid its darkening one-way streets of fear.
Here is no heaven, nor any open face,

Our very prayers are mutterings of the war,
And hatred has befouled each trysting-place

That love and languishment made sweet before.
We do not listen for your Philomel,

Our cars are tuned to a more deadly song,
And since destruction does not see so well

At night, *we* pray that day be not too long.
Where death can soar, even into the air,
There’s no escape, no peace, only despair.

21st March 1940

NATURE IS RICH

Nature is rich;
The force of her tremendous breathing
Could countless million times remake
Even your perfection;

But as a witch
Sees new worlds in her cauldron seething
And fears her microcosm might shake
And seeks protection,

With petulant blow
The cynic cauldron overturning:
So Nature with her jealous heart
Far futures dreading

Had dimmed the glow
Of life in your sweet cavern burning,
The womb, where visions dream apart
Unborn, unheeding. . . .

She's humbled now,
Her malice to obedience turning:
You have made life by your own art,
A new path treading,

And she brought low,
From you her mother-wit re-learning,
Shall feel in her reluctant heart
A new warmth spreading.

December 1939

TO PEGGY ASHCROFT

'There is a beauty we should not assess—
—The unconscious accident of perfect form:
We analyse—to find it has grown less,
And first amazement withers into scorn.
Your beauty is no accident. It lives
In each well-judged expression of your art,
And the enchantment of the whole survives
Analysis of each specific part.
Your tenderest simplicity can teem
With intricate complexities of skill,
And yet that skill can make the complex seem
A natural impulse—not an act of will;
While fantasy more rich than any dream
Lacquers this magic with more magic still.

1939

HARMONIC I

As on a violin
The inadvertent touching of a string
Sets an unbidden echo answering
In the still womb within;

As the despondent eye
Catching a gleam of the belated spring
In the far lifting of a swallow's wing
Will brighten instantly;

And as the splintered glass
That's but a fragment of some nobler thing
Under the sun's illumining
Remembers what it was;

So when I hear you sing
My heart lifts to the beating of your wing
And fragments of your rich imagining
Splinter and echo within.

December 1939

HARMONIC II

May not the violin
Sometimes resent its mastering,
Shrink from the slow cruel curving of the bow
Along the nerve-ridge,
From the long mane's stroking song on the delicate bridge,
From the strong mind winning
Control of the reluctant strings with its fingers' cunning?

I have been so long your instrument,
Strung to the pitch of your demanding beauty,
Resonant to no other touch
But the wand of your mind in my soul.
Yet now,
Now I must resent your mastering,
Shutter my heart and shatter
 the resonance of the bowl
That set my spirit shuddering
As the G-string on a violin shudders to the note of a
 deep bell.

Such harm there lies in your warm beauty,
Such winning cunning in the understanding of your eyes:
From your far deity even longing shrinks,
And desire's commanding
Is a strange voice blown, a vain spending,
Too faint to be heard at its goal.

You should not blame then
If the spirit withdraws,
Shrinks from the pain when
 you are its cause. . . .

I was your instrument,
Mind with yours consonant
In passion resonant
To no touch but yours. . . .

No blame then, but pity
If the spirit withdraws.

December 1940

RETURN

For Morna

Orpheus came back from Hades—so too I
Am granted my illusive liberty:
Twenty-four hours of return
Into a world where beauty need not lie,
Where knowledge need not shame to burn
The poor defences of inanity;
Where even a soldier may discern
His peace again, and gentleness relearn.

This hill looks on my home! My spirit fills
With the past-scented wind, that re-instils
Unhonoured faiths, forgotten peace.
This ridden moor has sculptured obstinate wills
Of men and horses; and these trees
Are rooted in the permanence of the hills:
There is a courage here that frees
Wisdom of pain, and love of bitterness.

The moon has foiled the shadows from this spur
And laked the house in gold. I've envied her
Each night this tender vigil. Frost,
Scattering its caprice of gossamer,
Flatters the landscape; and the ghost
Of this white Georgian backgrounded with fir
Haunts its own garden, playing host,
But shy to welcome. I'll enter—and be lost!

And yet my boots will blister those smooth floors
And print the crystal-quilted lawn with sores,
However humbly I may tread.

Out here even pain has a breadth; indoors
There's capture, and a joy I dread—
The arms of wife and children, and the paws
Of frantic dogs. . . . What's to be said
To them by one returning from the dead?

Said? Why, no words! Leave speaking to these walls,
That close in rush of love. The candle falls
Admonishing on them as they come,
And halts a globe of light. Caressing shawls
Of silence wrap away the drum;
And like these animals, warm leisure sprawls
Through all the house, contented, dumb,
Making a sweet, insidious prison of home.

Here then I'll beg what yesterday was mine:
Courage to love. For this hour I'll resign
The outcast's barren privilege
Of an unmoved heart. Loving, I shall mock time;
In one swift night live a full age,
And at sunrise scatter the October rime
With my mare's hoofs from the paddock hedge;
—Last hymn to freedom before pilgrimage.

September 1940

THE TEAR

Here in the lounge of this hotel
We struggle for our holy ground,
Our faces play discretion well,
Our deepest anguish breaks no sound;
The spirit's sole confession here
Swims in the crystal of one tear.

We speak; and there is pain in words,
And pain in heart that moves at them;
We splinter mercy into shards,
Yet stoop at once to gather them;
A thousand deaths we take and give,
A thousand deaths that two may live.

If one were evil, one were true,
We should not climb this long distress;
I should destroy the truth in you,
You would corrupt my steadfastness:
Yet here we wrestle, right for right,
As Jacob wrestled, all a night.

Nor you nor I can ever gain
This last decision that we seek,
Your victory will be your pain,
My triumph will be my defeat.
We must now for this logic part,
Twisting the wisdom of the heart.

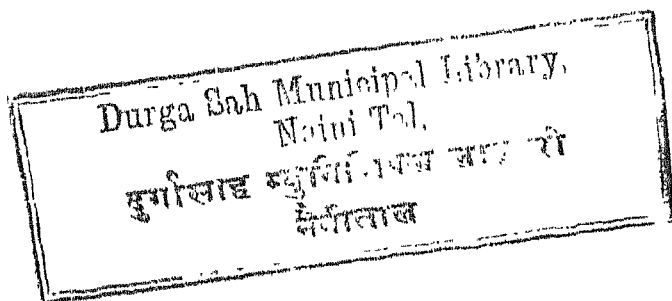
And yet, this lens of spirit here,
This crystal symbol in your eye,
Denies the images of fear,

Lends faith a new integrity;
In this proud oracle we find
Love neither asks nor grants an end.

Then truth's herself! The lie of fear
Blurs only edges of the mind;
In the swift focus of this tear
Hesitancies of faith have found
Concreteness. Now the ebb of doubt
Runs past the uttermost beaches out.

Now from your soul my eyes remove
One after one each settled mask;
Intuitive fingers of your love
Draw tendrils from my barren dusk:
Truth's inmost curtain opens wide,
And there is no more place to hide.

Cairo, January 1943



LOTUS

Reluctant-fingered the priest-sun
Relinquishes the lily-pond,
Surrenders love that was begun
In the white flower fond.

Now spills she from her waxen cup
The dew that their communion fed,
Now yields the holy novice up
Her ritual maidenhead,

And closes from his long caress
To dream in loverhood with death,
To immolate her loveliness
In the dark root beneath.

Seeks now the sun his celibate bed,
Accepts night's ceremonial stole;
Bows Nenuphar her sacred head,
Folds her bright aureole.

Cairo, February 1943

